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FOLDING FANS

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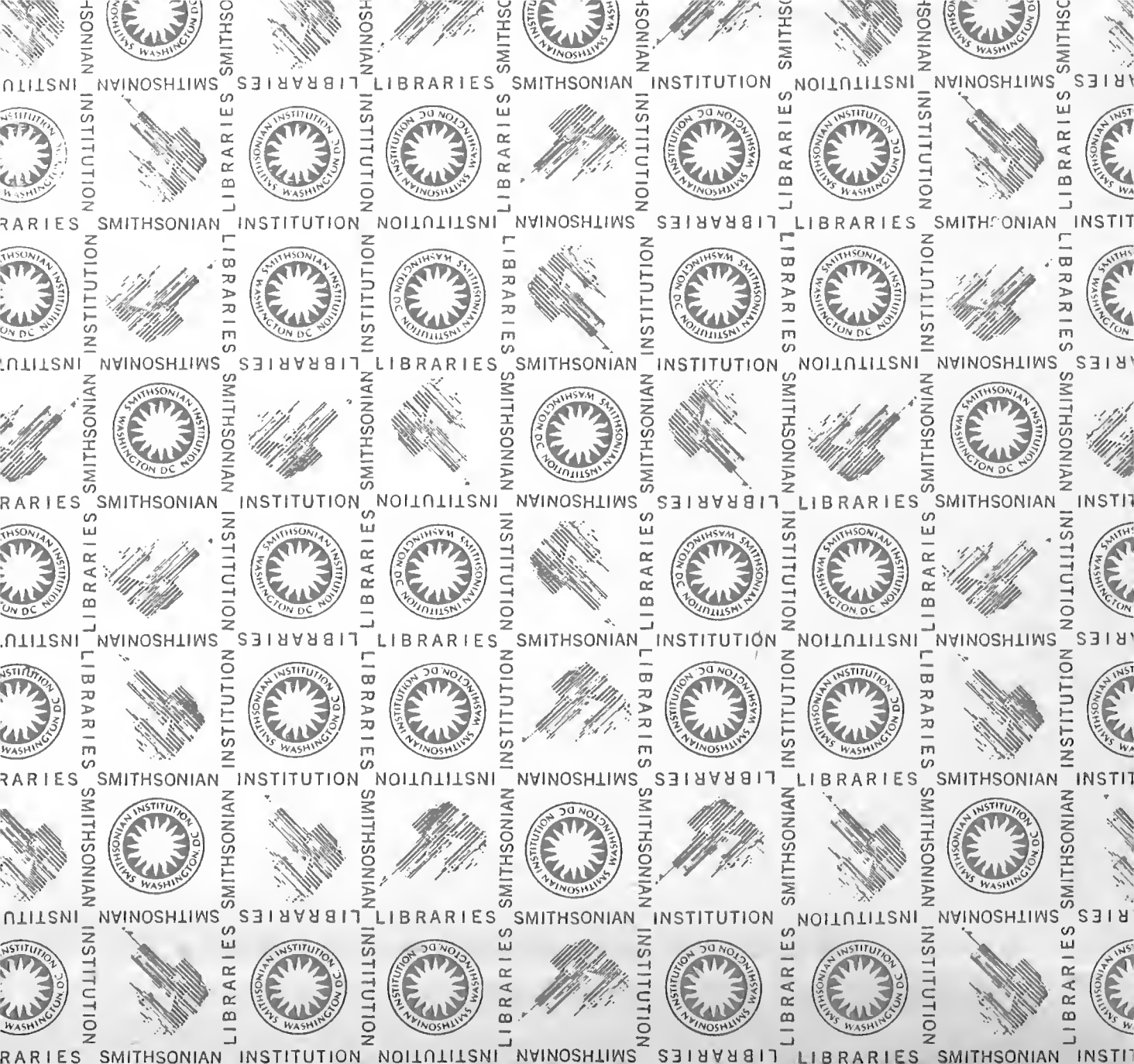
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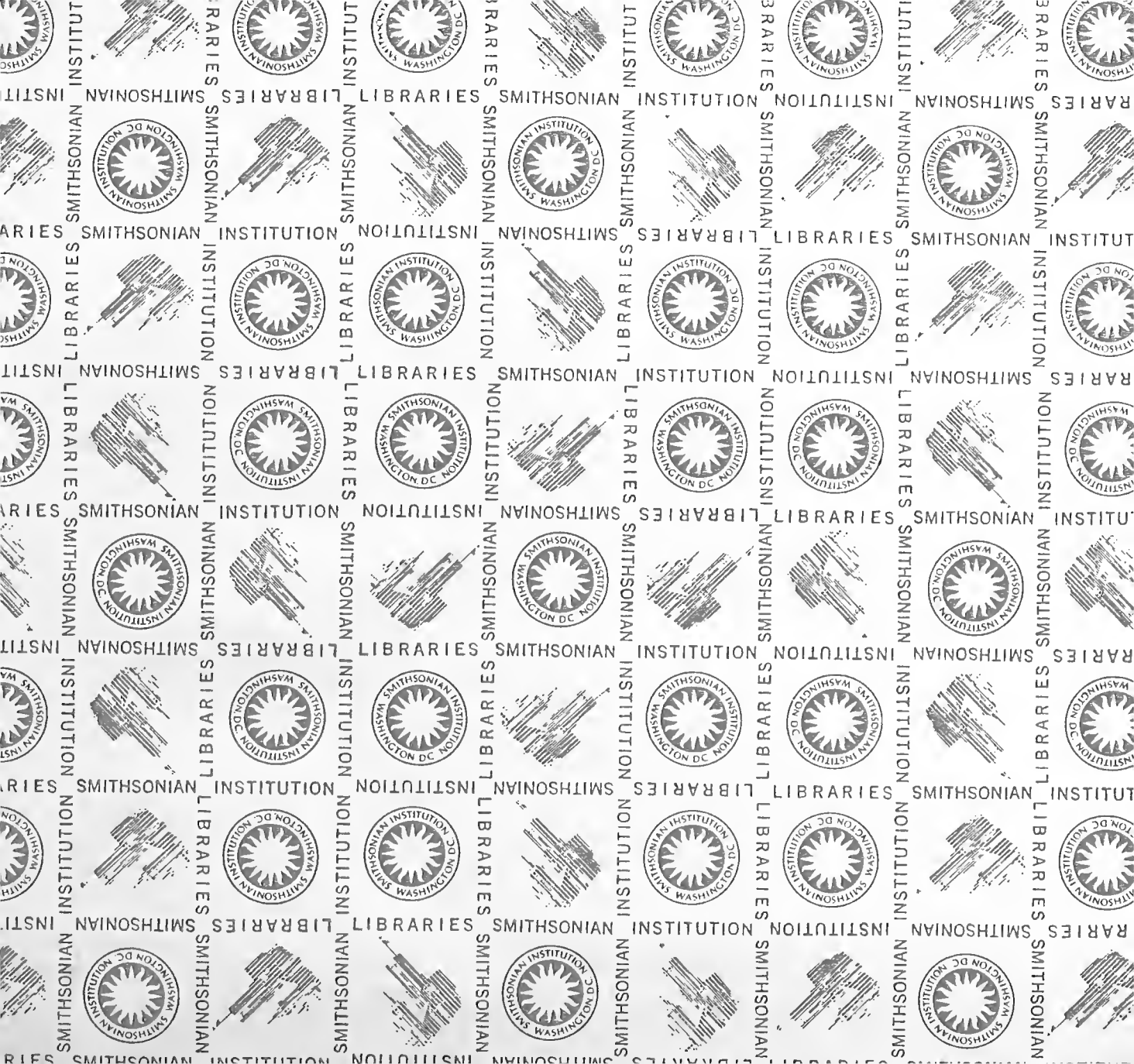
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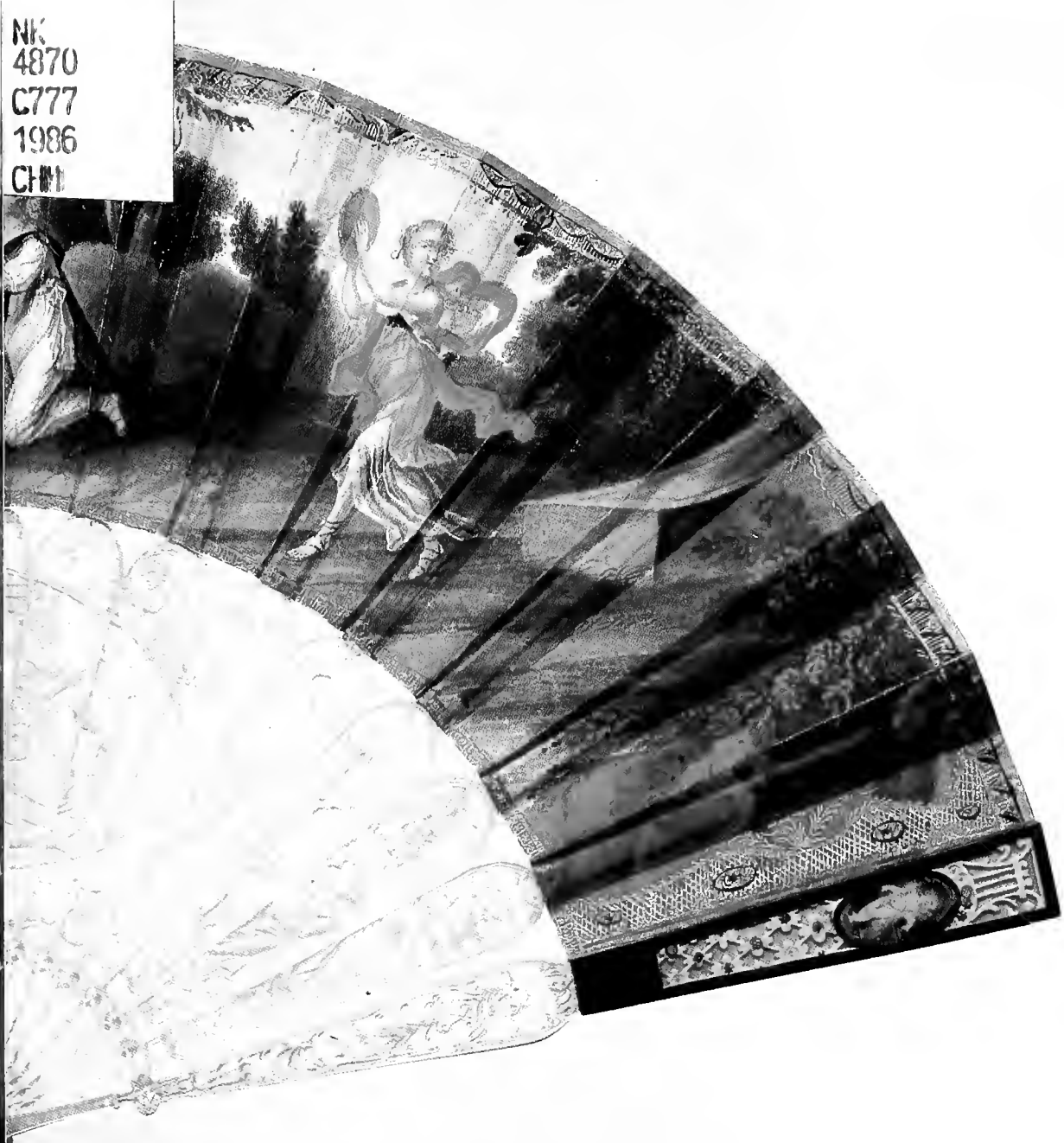

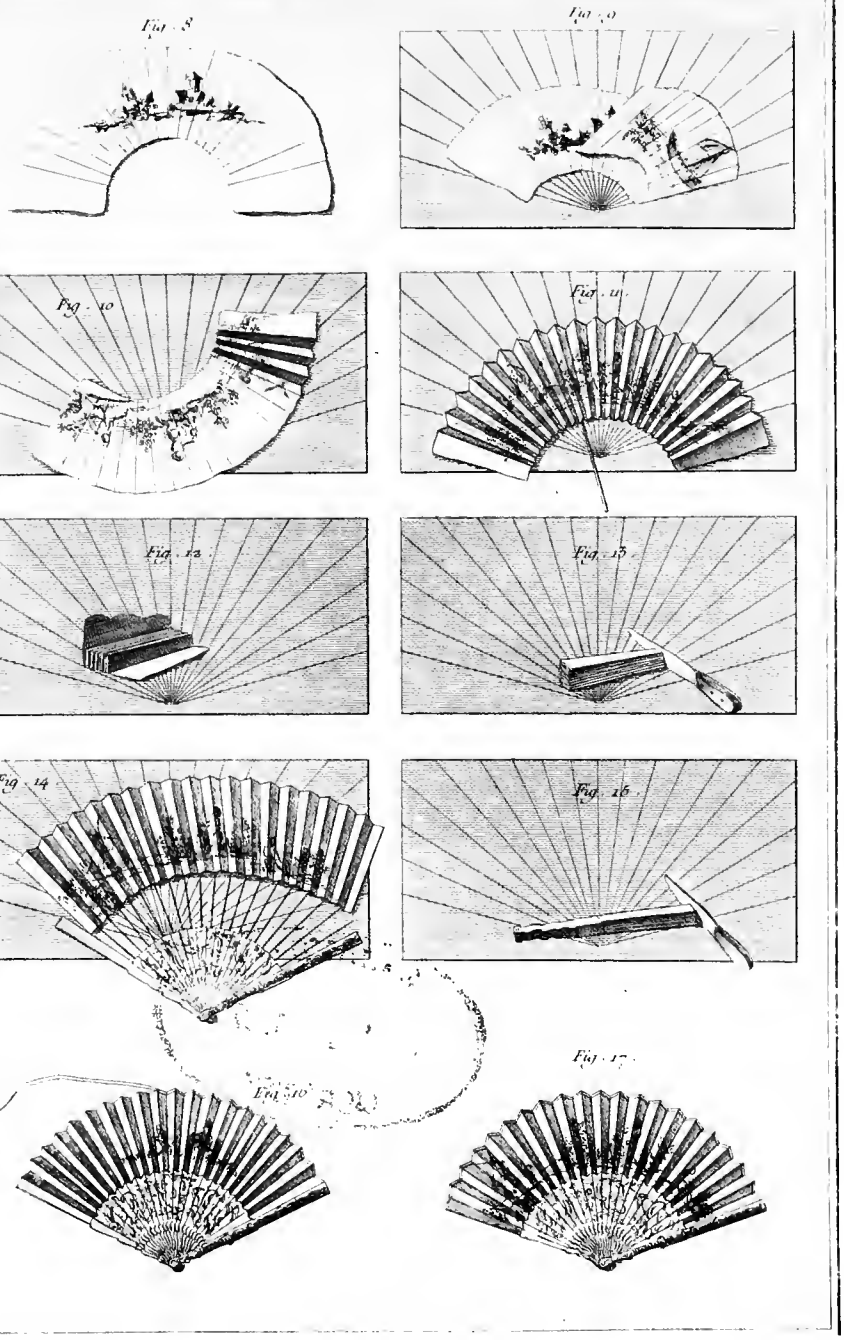
Fig. 8
Fig. 9
Fig. 10
Fig. 11
Fig. 12
Fig. 13
Fig. 14
Fig. 16
Fig. 15
Fig. 17

Folding Fans

in the Collection
of the
Cooper-Hewitt
Museum

The Smithsonian
Institution's
National Museum
of Design

Cover:
Pleated fan, 1800–10
England or France
Painted paper backed with parchment, sticks of carved and pierced ivory, mother-of-pearl, silver, metallic spangles
17.5 × 33.5 cm.
Anonymous gift
1952–161–240

This rare example of a painted fan from the early nineteenth century depicts an allegorical scene from Greek mythology: in the center, Athena, who protects heroes and represents wisdom, chastity, and victory in war, receives tribute from a kneeling virgin. An allegorical figure of fame blows on a horn while Cupid sleeps on the implements of war. The celebratory nature of the scene is repeated in the stick design, which may represent the return of the hero Odysseus.

Inside front cover:
Diderot, Denis.
L'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des metiers. Recueil de planches, sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts méchaniques, avec leur explication, Vol. 4, plate 4, "Le travail de l'eventailliste."
Paris: 1765
34.5 × 22 cm.
Gift of Mrs. George A. Kubler
1980–32–1650

This is the final of a series of four plates illustrating the fan-making process in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. The plate shows the mount being pleated and trimmed. The slips are illustrated being inserted into spaces between the front and back leaves and then the completed mount is shown being edged with a narrow band of paper.

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Photographs by Scott Hyde
Design by H Plus
Typography by Trufont Typographers, Inc.
Printing by Albert H. Vela Inc.

Opposite page:
Design for a fan guard, late 17th century
Probably Italy
Pen and black ink with watercolor
29 × 16.5 cm.
Purchased with funds from Mrs. Edward D. Brandegee
1938–88–5286

Note: All dimensions are in centimeters, with height preceding width.

This handbook has been made possible, in part, by a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts.

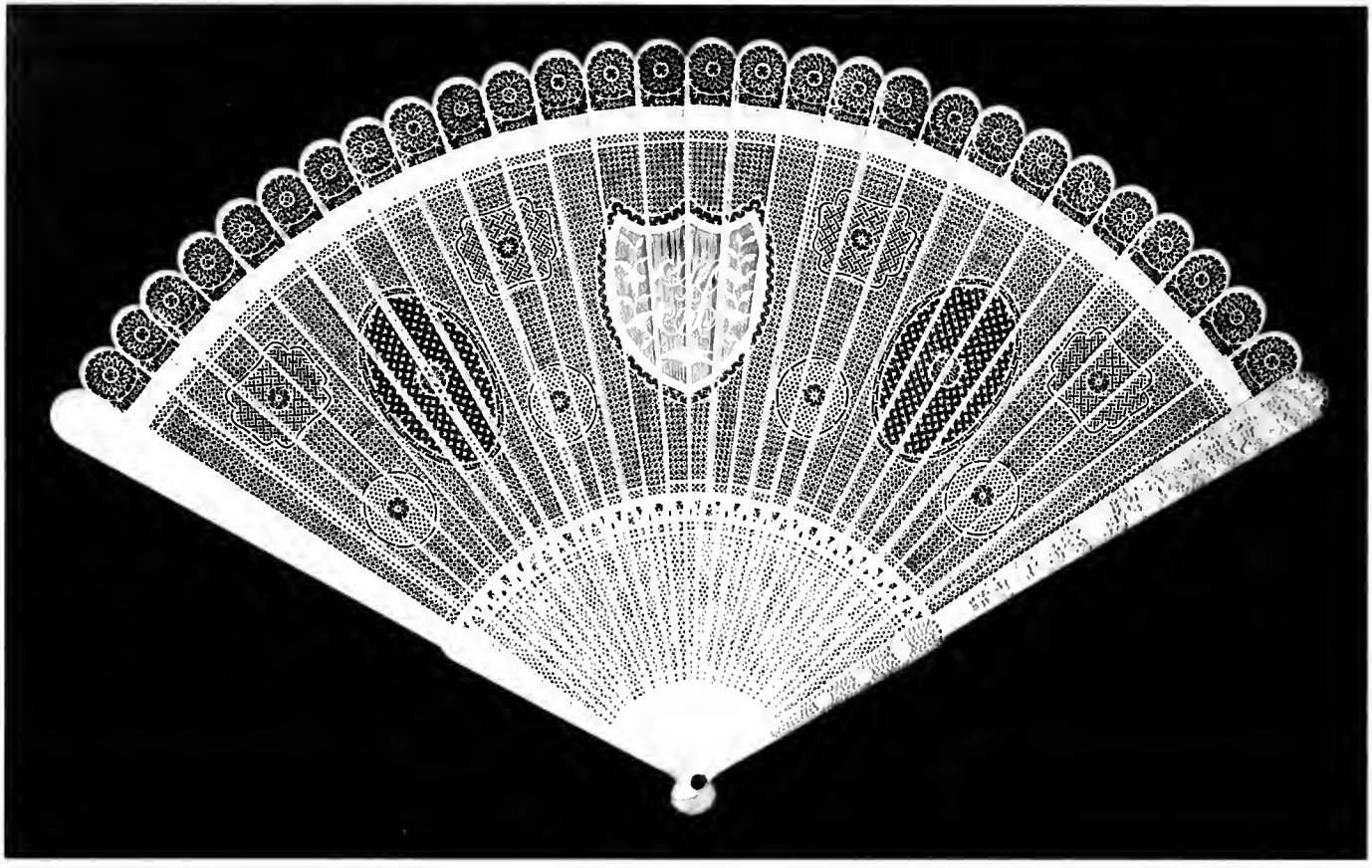
Foreword

In its early history as a costume accessory in the East and later in the West, the fan served as a symbol of rank or status held only in the hands of the rich and powerful. By the middle of the eighteenth century, as less expensive fans became available, the popularity of these charming personal effects had spread throughout society.

The Cooper-Hewitt has an important collection of over three hundred folding fans, fan leaves, and designs for fan leaves from Europe, the Orient, and America. The items in the collection date from the seventeenth century to the present and represent the work of painters, printers, lacemakers, embroiderers, and craftsmen skilled in working with ivory, bone, horn, tortoiseshell, metal, and wood.

The Museum's collection of folding fans is being brought before the public for the first time with the appearance of this handbook and the exhibition that it accompanies. We wish to thank the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for its generosity in supporting this project. We are grateful as well to the New York State Council on the Arts for help in funding this publication.

Lisa Taylor
Director

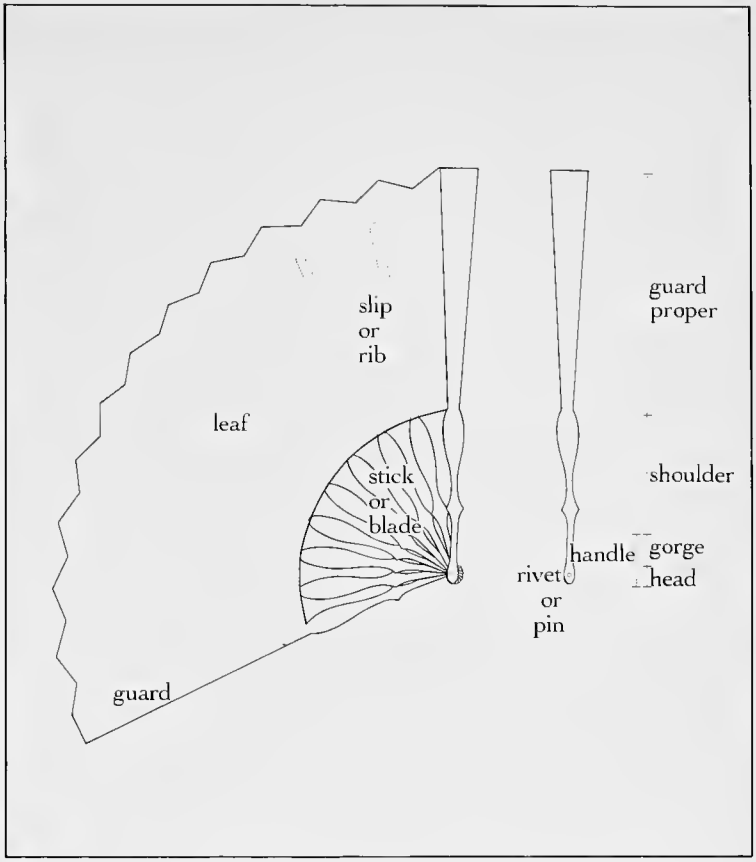


1.
Brisé fan, c. 1790
China for the Western market
Sticks of carved and pierced ivory, silk ribbon
37 × 45 cm.
Gift of Mrs. John Innes Kane
1926–22–114

The central shield on this Chinese fan is decorated with a monogram, probably that of the European customer who commissioned it. The tip of each stick takes the form of a stylized chrysanthemum.

Throughout its history the fan has been more than an item of fashion. Early fan-shaped tools were used for such tasks as fanning fires, providing shade, scattering insects, and winnowing grain. In fact, the word *fan* is derived from the Latin word *vannus*, a Roman tool for winnowing. The fan as we think of it today still has a practical function, for cooling or shading the face. Perhaps because it is usually held in proximity to the face, the fan has acquired social and symbolic importance as well. In both China and Japan, the two countries with the longest history of fan use, protocol dictated how, when, and by whom fans were to be used. Fans indicated rank and served as a shield in formal situations by screening the face and hiding emotions.

The basic shape of the fan is related to the shape of such common natural forms as leaves and birds' wings; indeed, the earliest fans were probably large leaves or palm fronds. The simplest and oldest man-made fan is the handscreen, a tool consisting of a non-folding "screen" fashioned of wood, paper, leather, woven straw, or feathers, with an attached handle. Handscreens were used in ancient cultures in tropical and temperate zones, from Egypt and India to China, Japan, and



2.
Guards of brisé fans, mid-19th century
Left to right: China, Switzerland, France or Austria
Carved ivory
20–24 cm.
Left to right:
Gift of Clarence Hoblitzelle, 1912–10–4; Bequest of Sarah Cooper Hewitt, 1931–6–127; Gift of Mrs. Robert B. Noyes, 1942–34–7A

3.
The parts of a pleated fan

Greece, and they are thought to be the predecessor of the folding fan. The earliest known handscreens in existence are two woven bamboo fans that were excavated from a second-century B.C. site, the Ma-wang-tui tomb, in the Hunan province of China.

Folding Fans: Structure and Materials

The folding fan has a more complex structure than the handscreen. It is more compact and convenient to use, however, and in the Orient it had surpassed the handscreen in popularity by the beginning of the fifteenth century. The two major types of folding fans are the brisé fan and the pleated fan. Of these two, the brisé is considered to be the older.

The word *brisé*, French for "broken," is used to describe a variety of folding objects such as screens and collapsible furniture. A brisé fan consists of rigid sticks that fold up between outer guards (figure 2). A rivet fastens the sticks together at the base, and a narrow ribbon or cord connects the sticks at their outer perimeters and holds them in slightly overlapping positions (figure 1).

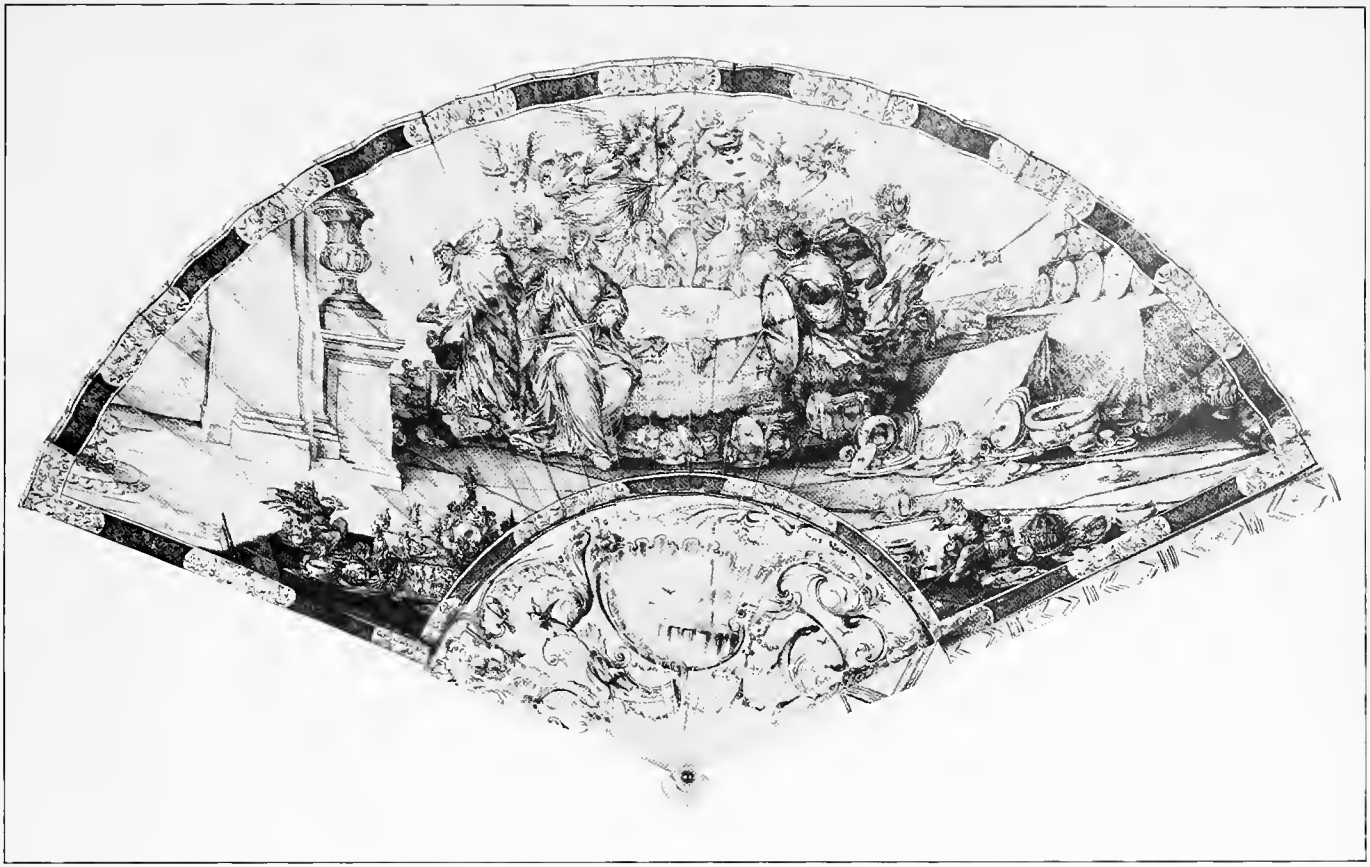
The earliest actual archaeological evidence of the brisé fan is a twelfth-century Oriental example found in a Japanese temple treasury. It has been suggested that the predecessor of the brisé fan may have been the small writing tablet that was used by court officials in China and Japan as early as the seventh century A.D. The tablets were made of rectangular plaques of jade, ivory, or wood that were held together at the base by a string threaded through a hole in each plaque. Court officials wore the tablets hanging from their belts and used them when they were in attendance to the Emperor for jotting down notes related to their responsibilities. Because the use of writing tablets was restricted to court officials, they became emblems of office.

The pleated fan also had its origins in the Orient, although it is unclear whether in China or Japan. Several legends exist attributing the invention of the pleated fan to the Japanese. The most popular story dates the invention to the period of the Emperor Ten-Ji (seventh century A.D.), when an artisan, inspired by the wings of a bat, made an object with a pleated flexible material stretched over rigid supports. The earliest surviving pleated fans have paper leaves and are from twelfth-century Japan.

The pleated fan consists of a semi-circular band or leaf supported by a set of sticks that are held together at the base by a rivet (figure 3). The leaf has pleats that allow the fan to be folded up accordion fashion between protective outer guards. The leaf is attached to slips, or ribs — the narrow upper portions of the sticks, which are either adhered to the back of a single leaf or inserted between two leaves that have been glued together to form a sandwich called a mount. Whether the leaf is single or double, both sides of the fan may be decorated, with the more important image on the front. The overall size of the fan, the number of sticks used in its construction, the amount of space between the sticks, the angle to which the fan can be opened, and the proportion of the leaf size to the sticks have all varied over time.

The materials and techniques used for the construction of fans have also changed along with styles and developments in technology. Certain materials meet the structural demands of the moving parts of the fan as well as providing a suitable surface for the display of craftsmanship and ornamentation. For instance, the mobility of the leaf requires materials that are strong yet flexible, and, if the fan is to be decorated, smooth-surfaced yet absorbent enough to be painted or drawn on. Parchment, because it has these properties, was one of the earliest materials used for fan leaves, and over the years it retained its popularity for expensive, high-quality pieces. Parchment is made by laboriously treating the skins of animals such as calves, sheep, goats, and pigs. As fans became more popular and generally available, other materials were used as well, including silk and lace for more elegant fans, and paper, linen, and stiffened cotton for simpler ones. Leaves were decorated with paintings in transparent or opaque water colors (gouache) or, when the technology developed, printed as a less expensive alternative. They were also embellished with punching and pricking, embroidery, and the application of feathers, spangles, straw, or pieces of ivory and mica. Fans so decorated were skillfully pleated at the least disruptive points of the design.

Stick materials are equally varied and reflect contemporary styles and technologies. Ideal stick materials are strong, lightweight, somewhat flexible, and fine-grained enough to be shaped in precise detail. Ivory, bone, mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell, horn, wood, metal, and synthetic plastics have all been used for fan sticks. These materials can be carved, incised, pierced, painted, lacquered, and embellished with metal pins (piqué), spangles, gems, or inlays of contrasting materials.



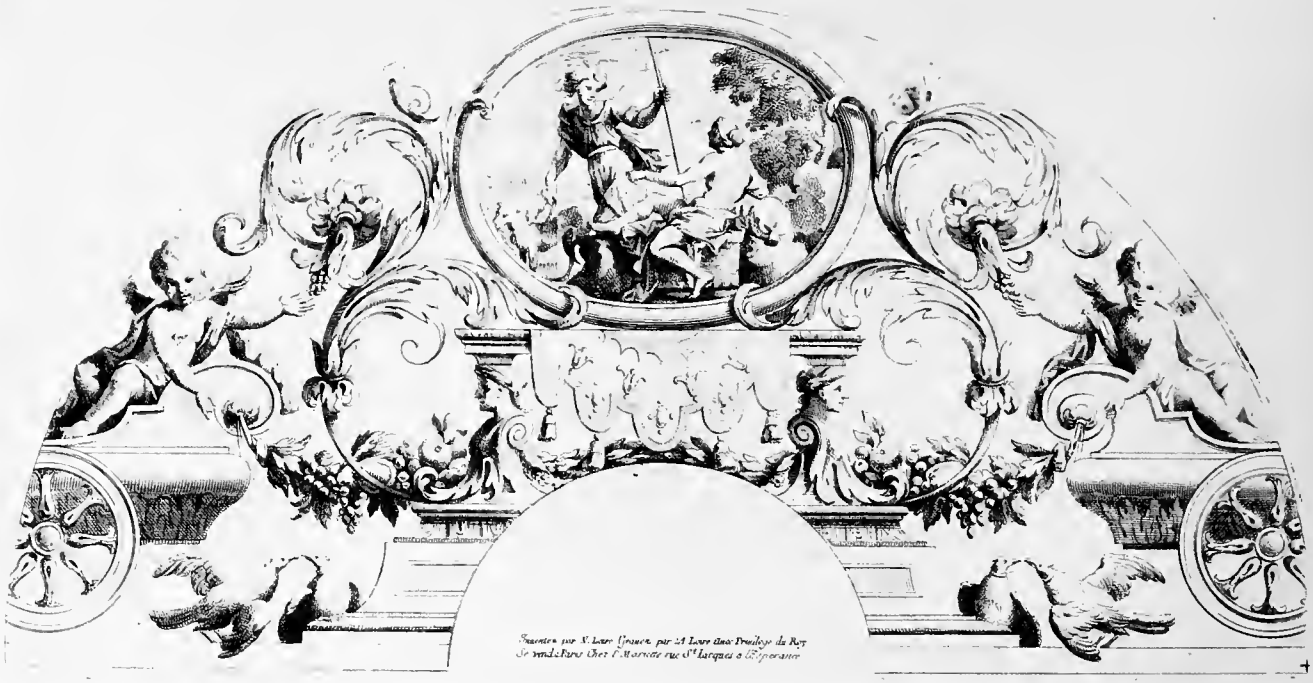
4.
Pleated fan, mid-17th century
Italy
Pen and ink on parchment, sticks of incised and painted ivory
30.5 × 54 cm.
Gift of Mrs. Max Farrand
1953–143–2

The feast of Belshazzar from the Book of Daniel is shown on the front leaf. The back leaf displays a drawing of Rome that indicates points of architectural interest.

Ivory from elephant tusks, one of the materials best-suited for fan sticks, was available in the Orient where the folding fan originated. Its tradition as a precious and rare material lends itself to the crafting of small, luxurious objects. Besides being dense and soft enough to carve, ivory can easily be painted or stained with pigments. As fans became more common, bone, a less expensive alternative to ivory, was also fashioned into fan sticks. The best bone comes from whales, and although it is less dense than ivory, can be crafted in similar ways.

Mother-of-pearl, with its natural beauty and luster, is another material that was prized for fan sticks. It is extracted in relatively small pieces from the inside of various mollusk shells and is usually spliced together to achieve the length of a stick or guard. Mother-of-pearl occurs in nature in many hues: a white pearl, an opalescent black, and a rainbow hue. Because it is somewhat brittle, mother-of-pearl cannot be carved as intricately as ivory.

Other materials used for fan sticks are animal horn and tortoiseshell. These materials are difficult to carve, but they can be molded by heat, and, in the case of translucent horn, can be



5.
Design for a fan, c. 1675
Nicolas Loir (1624–79), France
Etching and engraving on paper
21.5 × 42 cm.
1944–16–8B
Purchased in memory of
Mrs. John Innes Kane

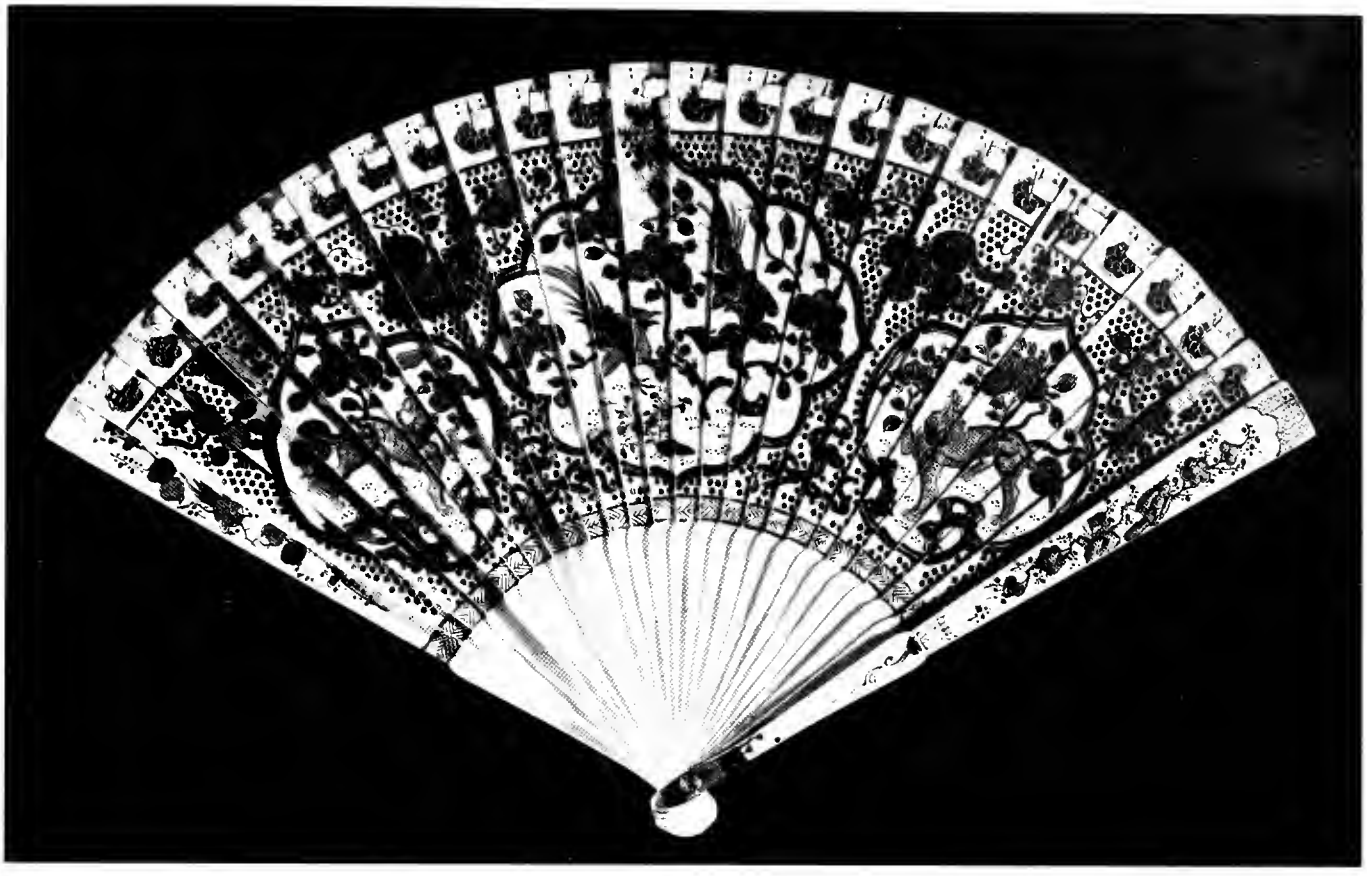
This print is from a set of designs for fans, handscreens, and other ornaments. The central medallion shows a scene from Greek mythology, Aphrodite imploring Adonis not to leave on a hunting trip.

stained to look like more expensive materials such as tortoiseshell.

Wood was also considered suitable for fan sticks. Traditional choices included sandalwood (which has a pleasant aroma), bamboo, laburnum, holly, and fruitwoods, such as pear. These woods are fine grained and easy to carve. Wooden sticks, like those in other materials, were often painted, lacquered, or stained.

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, advancing technologies have provided synthetic plastics and other man-made materials for fan manufacture. These materials were of particular interest to fan-makers since they could be made to imitate natural materials such as ivory, tortoiseshell, and horn.

Frequently parts of the fan were fashioned of contrasting materials that visually complemented and structurally reenforced the sticks and the leaves. Around the rivet, contrasting materials were used for thumbguards to strengthen the heavily handled head of the fan (figures 6 and 7), or for washers that were used as spacers to protect the guards from the rivet. The slips, which are the



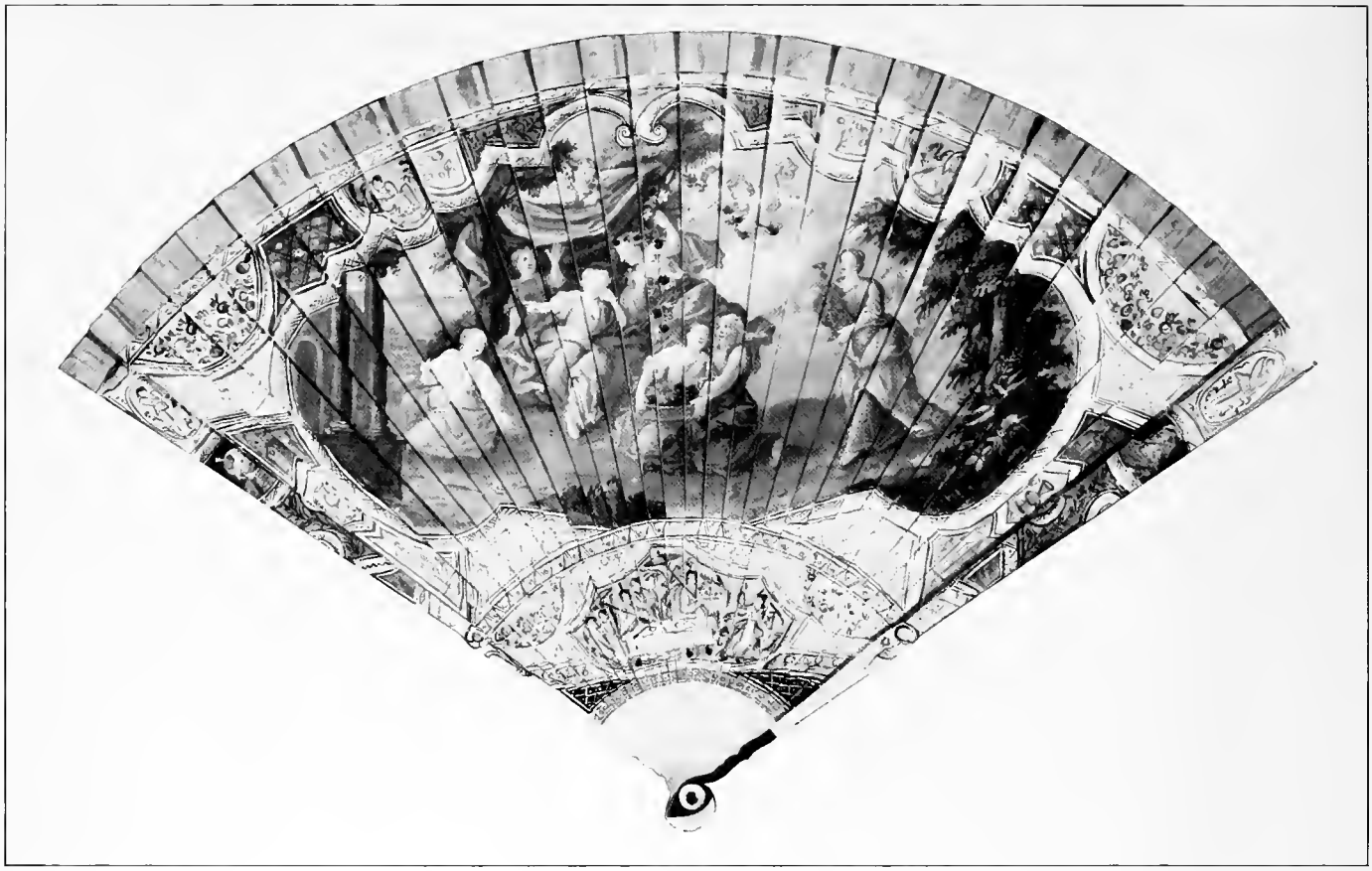
6.
Brisé fan, c. 1710–20
China for the Dutch market
Sticks of pierced and painted ivory, tortoiseshell thumb guard, leather ribbon added later
19 × 30.5 cm.
Gift of Miss Elizabeth d'Hauteville Kean
1923–24–3

This fan is decorated in the "Chinese Imari" porcelain style. Imari-ware was produced in China for export from 1705 to 1730.

fine, flexible extensions of the sticks, were usually made of another, less expensive material.

History

The use of the folding fan as a personal fashion accessory in Europe seems to have developed around the sixteenth century, when Portugal, Spain, Italy, England, and Holland started trading actively with the Orient. Europeans did have an earlier version of a folding fan. From the sixth through the fifteenth century, the *flabellum*, a type of fan with pleated leaves that opened to a full 360-degree circle, was used in Eastern Mediterranean Christian ritual to fan away insects during the consecration of the host. Over time, the breeze from the flabellum came to be associated with a divine presence, and this holy connection excluded the flabellum from everyday use. It was in the sixteenth century when luxury goods such as silks, porcelains, lacquerware, and fans were arriving from the Orient, that Europe was provided with the format for the fan, the design inspiration, and the traditions of practical and social usage.



7.
Brisé fan, 1720–25
France or Holland
Sticks of painted and varnished ivory, tortoiseshell thumb guard, silk ribbon
21.5 × 30 cm.
Anonymous gift
1952–161–198

This is an example of a Vernis Martin fan. The large central cartouche contains a scene from Greek mythology in which Bacchus discovers Ariadne on the island of Naxos. European and Oriental motifs are combined on a diapered ground.

At first fans were adopted primarily by royalty and aristocracy. Queen Elizabeth I of England was particularly fond of them and had herself portrayed holding a rigid feather fan in 1575. Later, in 1592, in another portrait, she can be seen holding a folding fan. In 1594 in France, Henry IV enacted a statute governing the activities of the French fan-makers and gilders who decorated fans made of silk and animal skins.

By the early seventeenth century, the rigid fan was supplanted in popularity in Europe by the folding fan, just as it had been in the Orient. At this time, trade with the Orient became increasingly active through the trading companies of the Dutch, British, and, later, the French, and quantities of Oriental fans and fan parts, primarily sticks to be joined with European leaves, were imported into Europe.

As the fan became integrated into European life, it reflected current European tastes in painting (figure 4), the decorative arts, and costume. The upper classes in seventeenth-century France led the way in a trend towards comfort and social grace that eventually affected all of

Europe. As can be seen in paintings and prints of the period, the fan became an important accessory in this new movement. Through women like the Marquise de Rambouillet (1588–1665), the "salon" was established, social behavior became more refined, and social entertaining became part of court life. In the winter, women used fans to shield their faces from the fire around which they socialized. In the summer, they used fans to keep their faces cool, to keep air circulating in stuffy interiors, and to disperse insects and unpleasant odors.

During the early part of the seventeenth century, most European folding fans were produced in Italy, one of the first countries into which the folding fan had been introduced from the Orient. Fans made in Italy were exported to other parts of Europe. By the end of the century, however, France's fan industry had surpassed that of the Italians. In 1673, the French fan industry was well enough established to incorporate sixty master fan-makers into the Association des Eventaillistes (Fan-makers Guild) under the patronage of Louis XIV.

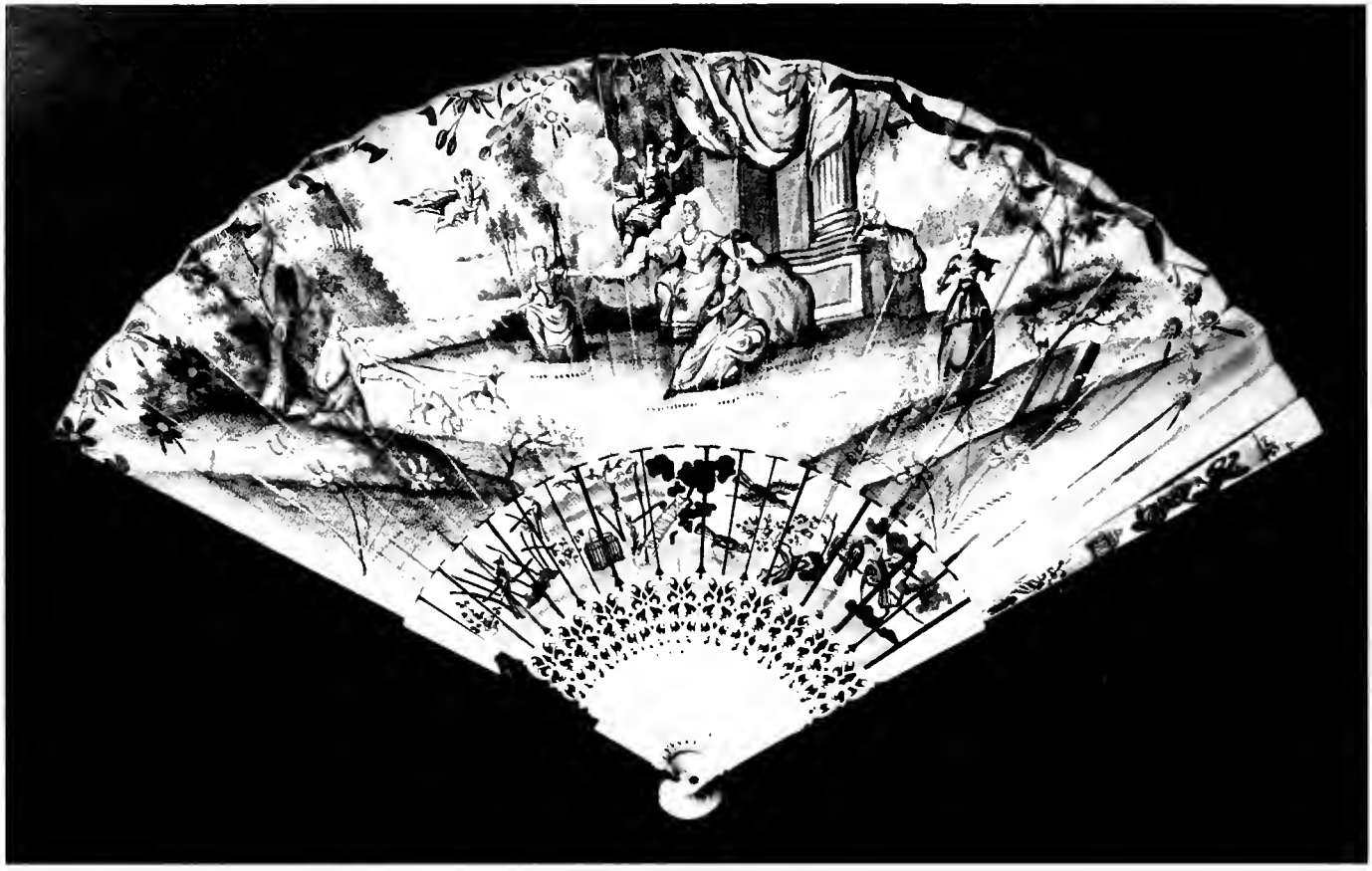
Although very few seventeenth-century fans are extant today, evidence of their use survives in contemporary paintings and prints and in designs for fans (figure 5). These documents helped to spread fan styles and usage throughout Europe. Political changes also served to disseminate fashions among the countries of Europe. Influences from the Continent were brought to England by exiled aristocrats accompanying Charles II on his return to the throne in 1660. Awareness of Dutch culture, itself strongly influenced by French taste, grew in England with the crowning of William III, the Dutch Prince of Orange, as the English monarch in 1689.

The movement of craftsmen also affected the popularity of fans. One of the most disruptive political events of the seventeenth century was the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685. The Edict, decreed in 1598 by Henry IV of France, sanctioned the existence of Protestantism within France. When it was revoked, French Protestants (Huguenots) fled France for such Protestant countries as England, Holland, parts of Germany, or other regions in which their religion would be tolerated. Many of the Huguenots who left France were craftsmen, including fan-makers. The effect of this forced emigration was to spread fan artistry to other parts of Europe.

The popularity of fans in Europe was evidenced during the last quarter of the century by the ever-increasing influx of fans and fan sticks from the Orient. The volume of fans being imported from the Orient posed such a threat to the English fan industry that Charles II (1660–85) passed a statute placing a heavy duty on foreign fans. In 1699, twenty thousand fans with lacquer sticks and painted paper leaves were imported into England from China. These export Chinese fans were made specifically for the Western, "barbarian," market and were of a lesser quality than those used by the Chinese themselves.

Oriental fan styles influenced European fan-makers, who were inspired particularly by the lacquered wood and carved ivory of the Orient. Toward the close of the seventeenth century, treatises began to be published in Europe on techniques for imitating the lacquerwork of the East, and soon master lacquerers were working out of most of the major cities of France, England, Italy, Germany, and Holland, decorating fan sticks, furniture, and other objects. The first European brisé fans date from this time.

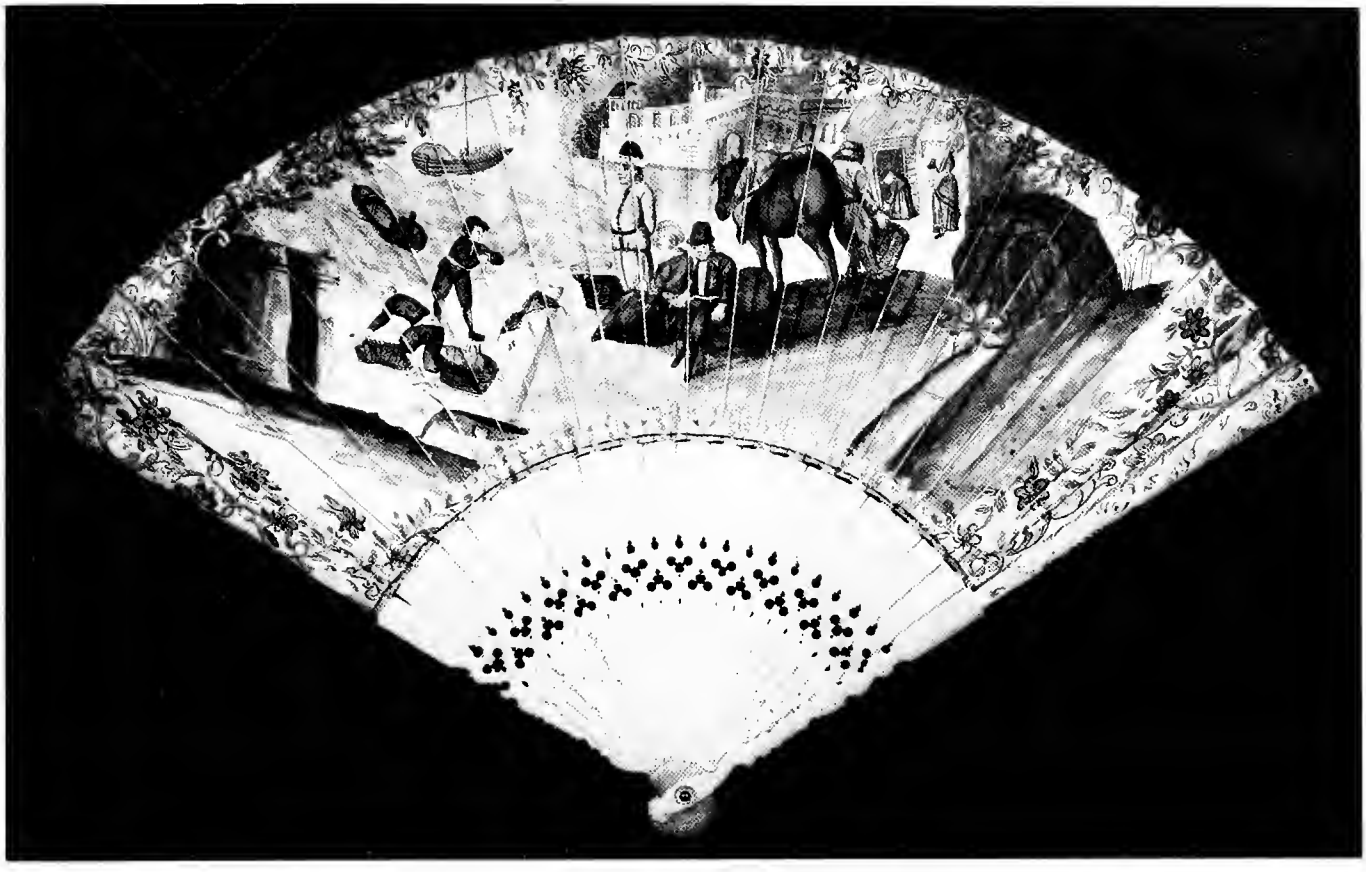
The influence of Chinese design reached its peak at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the brisé fan became popular in Europe. Early examples of Chinese brisé fans made for the Western market catered to the European, and particularly the Dutch, enthusiasm for Oriental



8.
Pleated fan, c. 1725–40
Probably England
Etched and hand-colored paper backed with painted paper, sticks of pierced and painted ivory
28 × 47 cm.
Bequest of Emily H. Chauncey
1959–156–4

porcelain styles (figure 6). During the period 1720 to 1740, this type of Oriental brisé fan was transformed in Europe into what are called Vernis Martin fans. The term refers to the varnished surface of these painted ivory fans, named after the four Martin brothers, the best known of the European inventors of a high quality varnish that served as a substitute for Oriental lacquer. The distinctive surface effect, achieved with carefully finished layers of paint and varnish, was used on furniture and many decorative objects of the period. The decoration on Vernis Martin fans is usually divided into two sections, upper and lower, which correspond to the proportions of leaf to stick on a pleated fan. The upper section usually depicts a European motif, such as a Biblical or classical scene, and the lower portion is usually an unrelated chinoiserie motif (figure 7).

By the eighteenth century, over twenty different kinds of craftsmen, often in different locations, were involved in the production of fans. There were leaf designers, leaf painters, printers, stick carvers, inlayers, gilders, ribbon-weavers, and assemblers. Leaves, sticks, and finished fans were imported and exported among the fan-producing countries of Europe, and to

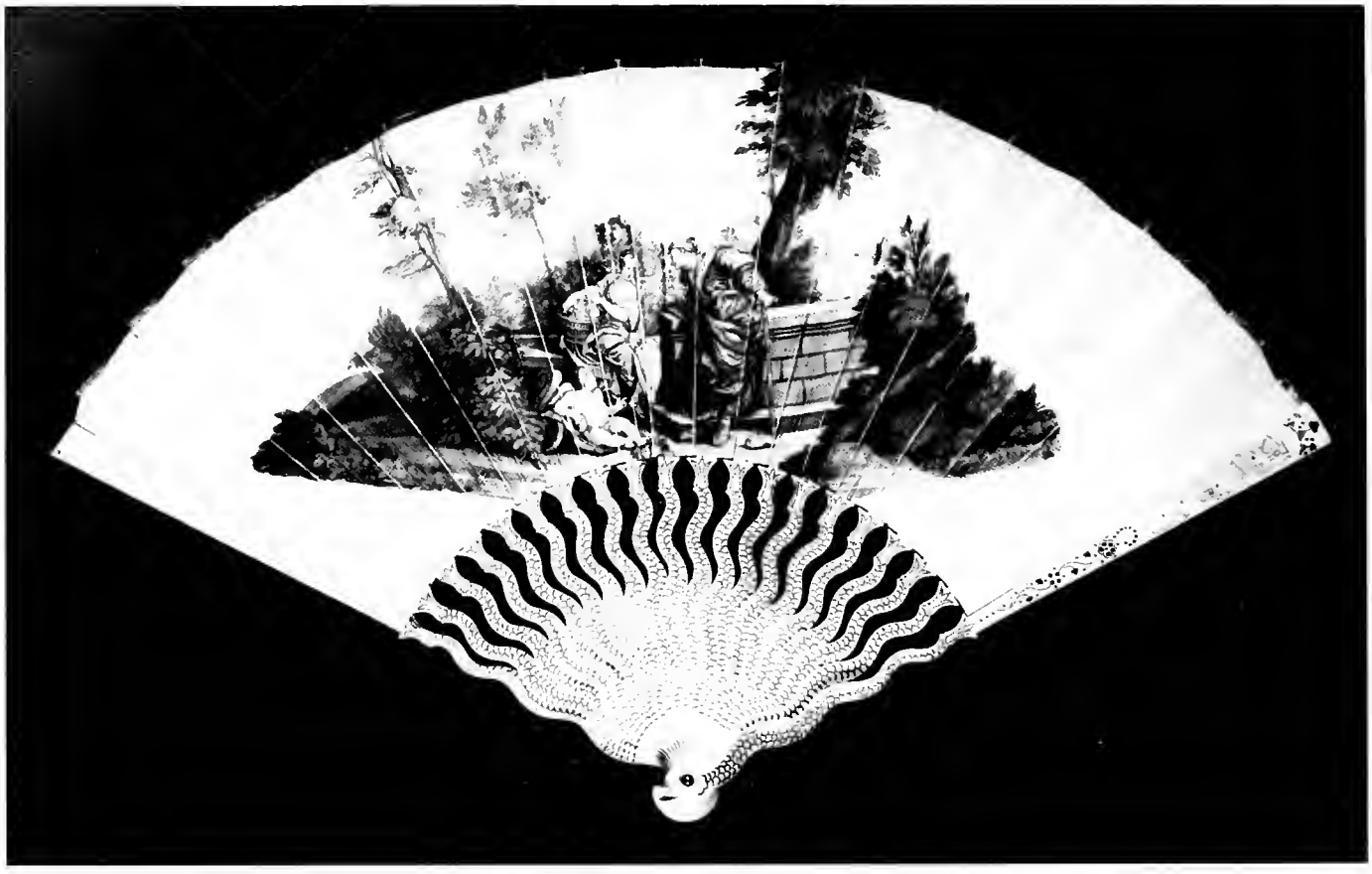


9.
Pleated fan, c. 1730
Holland or Germany
Painted parchment, sticks of carved and pierced ivory
27 × 43 cm.
Gift of Mrs. Beatrix Farrand
1943-11-2

The guards are carved with a serpentine fish motif that complements the seafaring theme of the leaf.

some extent, America. In France, many of the specialized craftsmen were organized into different guilds, as were master fan-makers who assembled the fans and orchestrated the entire production process. The Association des Eventaillistes in France listed nearly 150 master fan-makers as members by the third quarter of the eighteenth century. The Worshipful Company of Fan Makers in London, chartered in 1709, counted an enrollment of over eight hundred craftsmen by 1747. In Sweden, the Order of the Fan was chartered in 1744 to govern fan production in that country.

France, and particularly Paris, served as Europe's style-setter during most of the eighteenth century. One indication of the great interest that the French upper classes had in the decorative arts was the publication in the 1750s of the *Encyclopédie* edited by Denis Diderot, which featured annotated illustrations of numerous mechanical and artistic objects and their production methods. The 1765 edition describes in full detail the assembly of fans (see Inside Cover), including the use of a leaf-pleating mold invented in 1760 by Edouard Petit of the Paris fan-making house of Ducrot & Petit. The fact that this series of plates does not describe the production and embellishment of



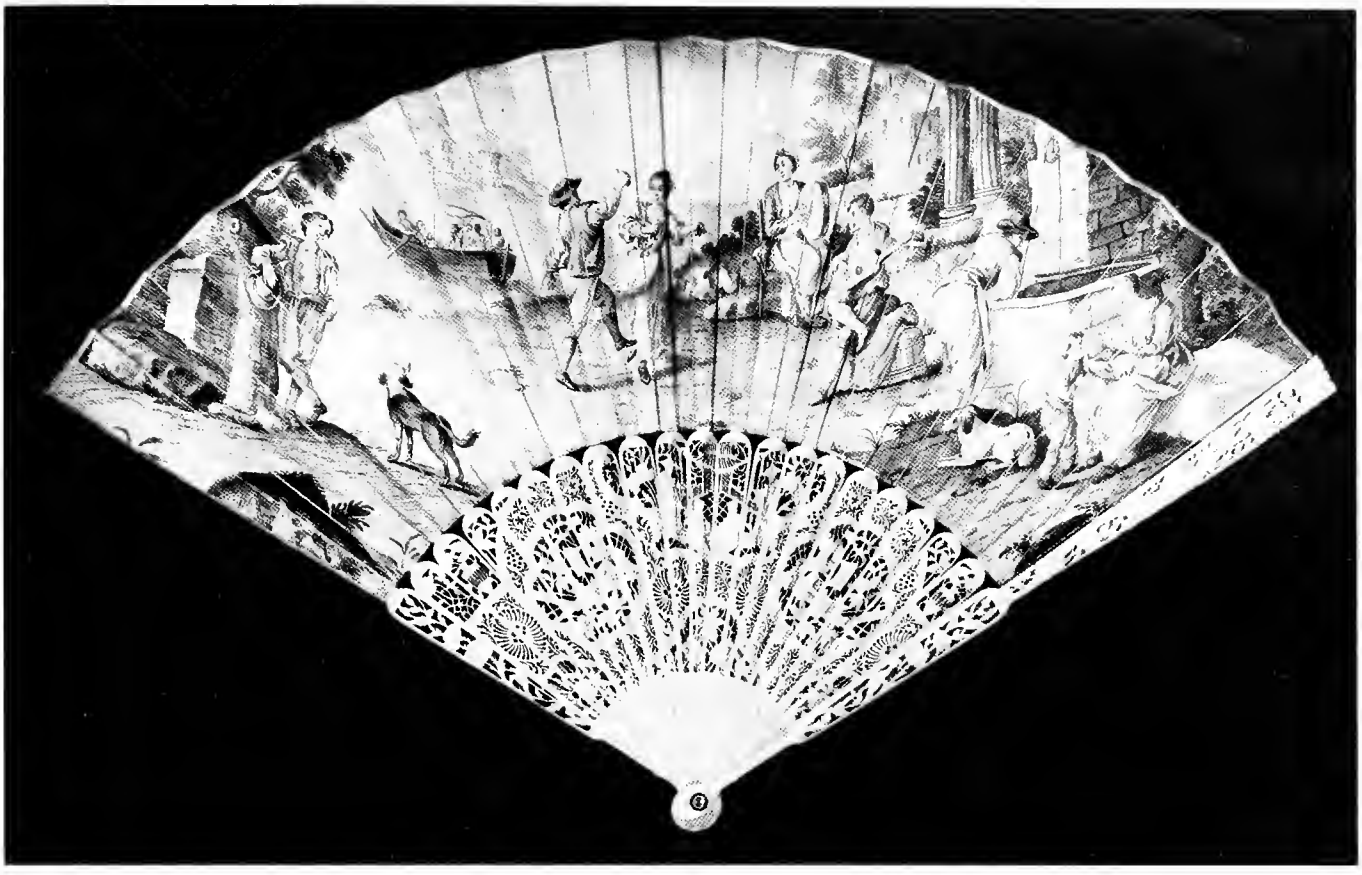
10.
Pleated fan, c. 1740–50
France or England
Painted paper backed with plain paper, sticks of ivory with piqué work, mother-of-pearl
27 × 44.5 cm.
Gift of Sarah Cooper Hewitt
1931-6-125

The leaf shows a scene from Roman mythology in which Vertumnus seduces Pomona by assuming the guise of an old woman. Both Pomona, holding a basket of fruit, and Vertumnus are deities connected with fruit trees.

the fan sticks supports the idea that the sticks were obtained from a variety of sources, including the Orient (figure 11).

The strong division of labor within the fan industry, the heavy trading of fans and their parts, and the rapid changes in styles during the eighteenth century make precise dating and the establishment of provenance for individual fans difficult. New leaves were often mounted on old sticks, both because sticks tended to outlast the more fragile fan leaves and in order to keep pace with current fashions. Craftsmen of the period advertised new fans as well as their services to repair and refurbish old ones. The movement of craftsmen from one country to another and the production of fans specifically for foreign markets further complicate accurate identification.

To meet the huge demand for fans, large numbers of fans and carved fan sticks continued to be imported by the various East Indian companies. These imported fans were sold through public auction, by shopkeepers, or directly to individuals who had commissioned them. The importation of inexpensive fans from China continued to threaten European fan-makers, who made numerous

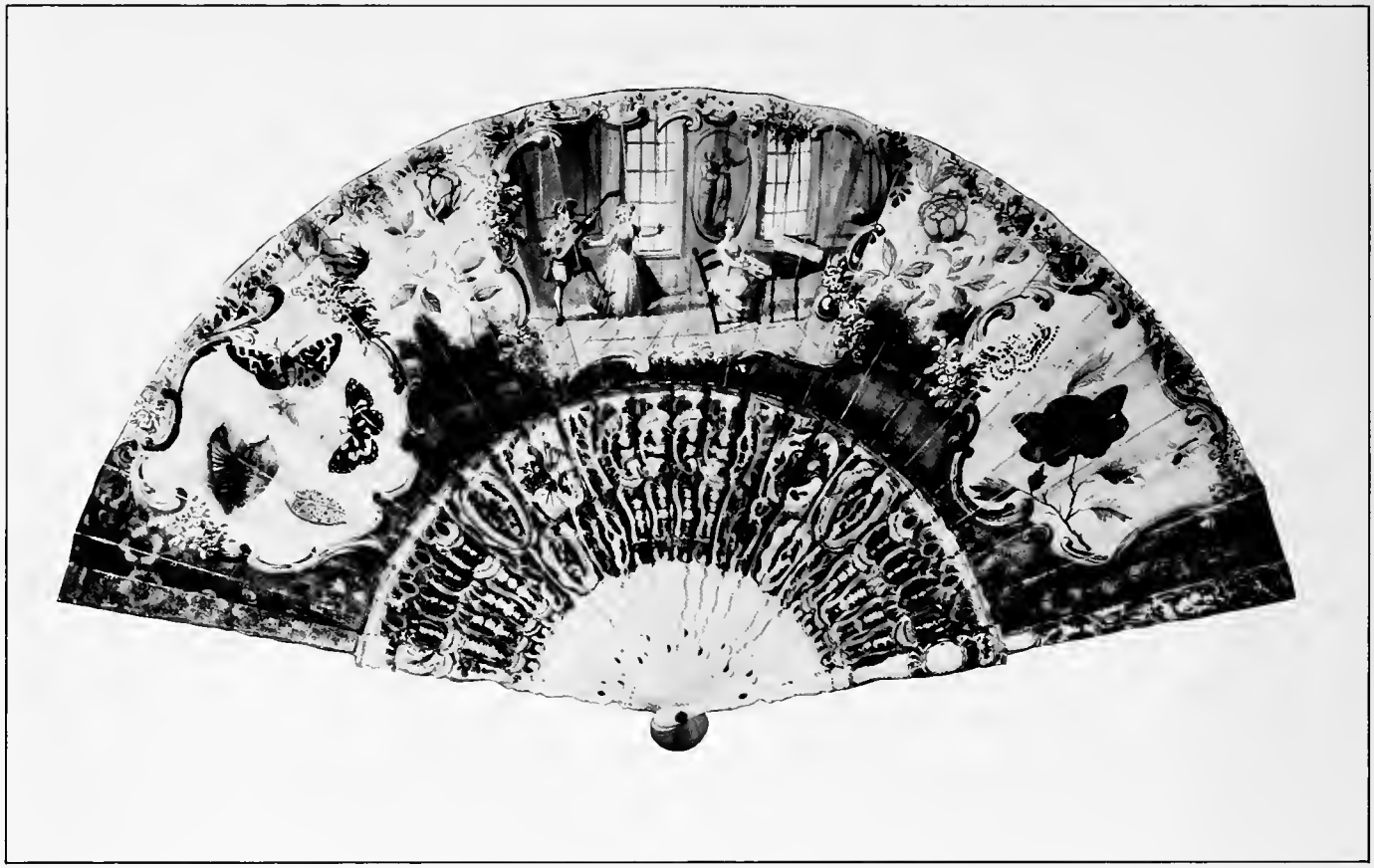


11.
Pleated fan, c. 1750
Probably Italy
Painted parchment, sticks of carved and pierced ivory
29 × 49 cm.
Gift of Mrs. Robertson D. Ward
1970–58–19

This fan is an interesting example of the amalgamation of Chinese and European materials. The sticks and guards, carved with Oriental motifs, are probably Chinese for export, while the painting on the leaves was executed by a European artist.

appeals, especially in England, to their governments and to the East India companies to prohibit or tax imported fans. Due to the popularity of Chinese styles through the third quarter of the eighteenth century, and also to make their products more competitive, European fan-makers began to produce fans in the style of the Chinese (chinoiserie) (figure 13).

The eighteenth century has traditionally been considered the era in which fan use, production, and artistry reached their heights. The fan continued to be used as a tool, both practical and social. A pale complexion was fashionable and fans were employed to protect women's faces from redness caused by sitting near the fire or in the sun. Women kept their faces cool (and their heavily applied makeup intact) with fans. The lack of ventilation indoors, generally poor hygiene, and the discomfort of the tight-bodiced dresses of the period were all relieved by the refreshing breeze of a fan. Initially fans were collected only by the wealthy, but by the middle of the eighteenth century, with the advent of cheaper printed fan leaves (figure 8) and plentiful imports, they became available to the middle class. It became essential that a well-attired woman have a complete

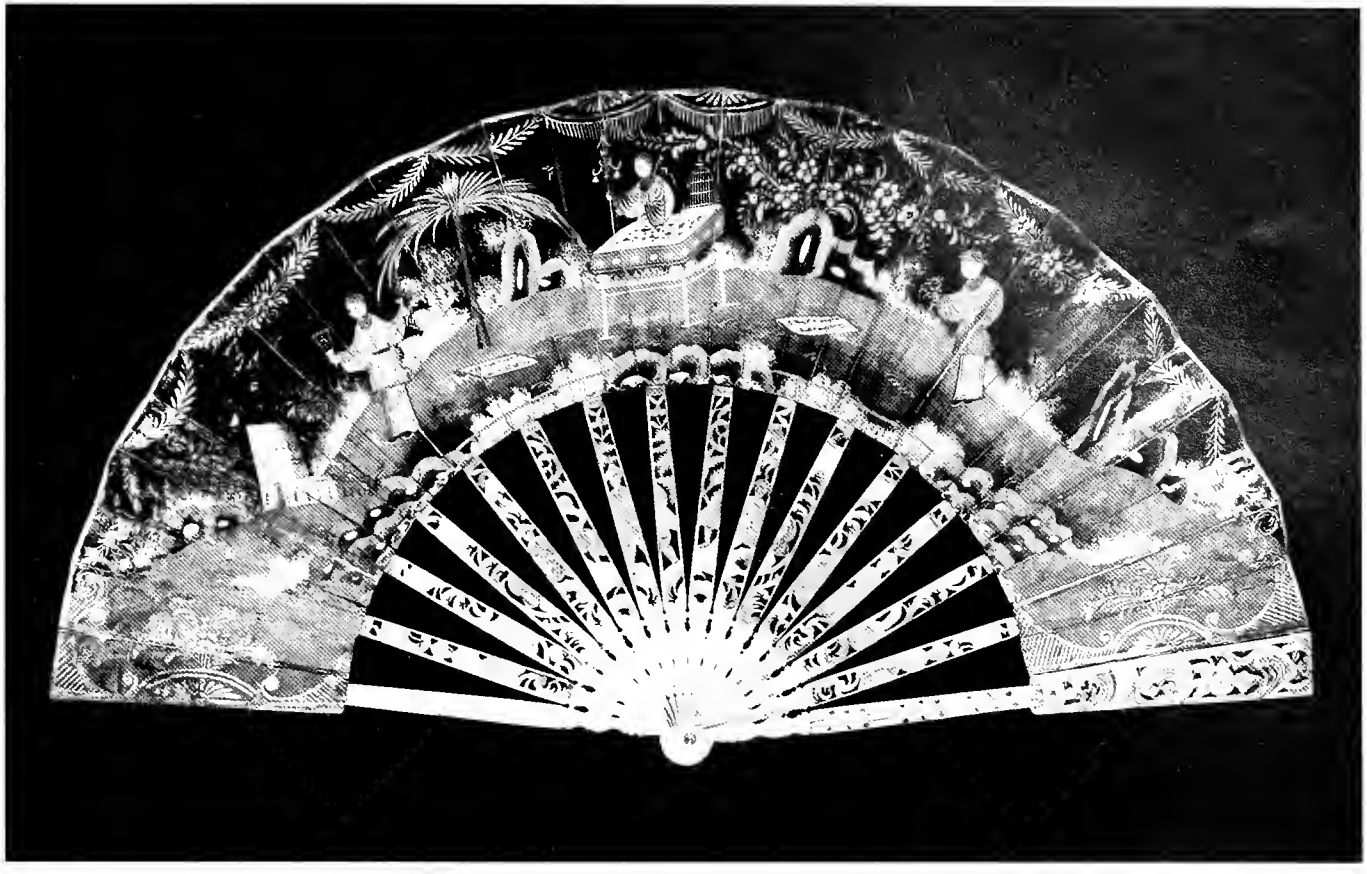


12.
Pleated fan, c. 1740–60
England or France
Painted parchment, sticks of carved, incised, pierced, and painted ivory, mother-of-pearl, colored foil
29 × 55 cm.
Gift of Mrs. A. Murray Young
1937–28–2A

The central cartouche shows three musicians in an interior setting. The musical theme is repeated on the sticks and guards with carved putti playing musical instruments.

wardrobe of fans for different occasions, such as fancy balls, weddings, casual entertaining, and mourning. Along with this development came the need to know how to handle the fan correctly. Etiquette manuals instructed young women of good breeding on the use of the fan. Madame de Staël (1766–1817) pronounced, "The woman of breeding differs from others in her use of the fan. Even the most charming and elegant woman, if she cannot manage her fan, appears ridiculous." Correct positions for the fan in different social settings were popularized by publications in England, France, and Holland.

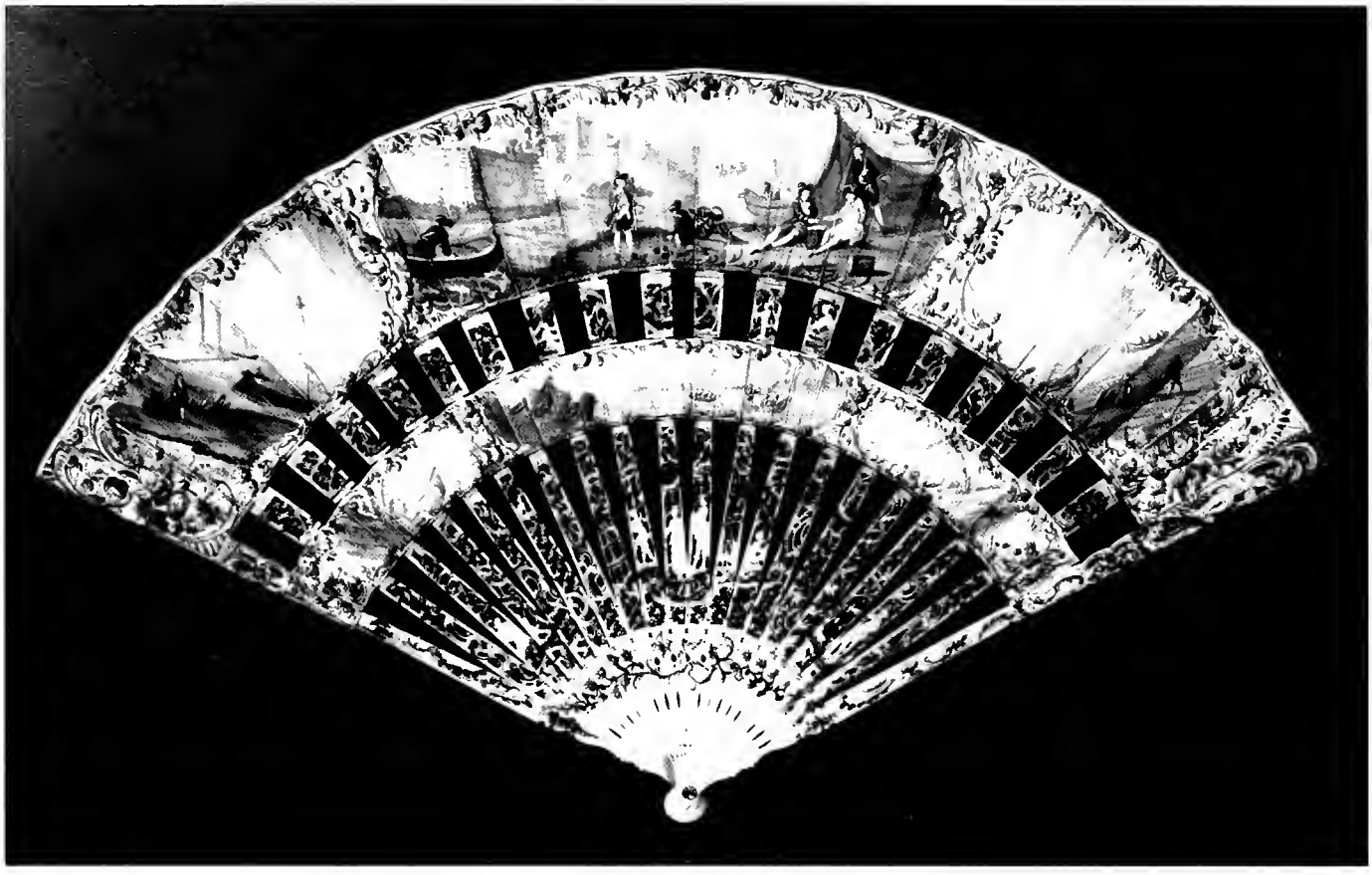
Although there were contemporary satirical comments about a formal fan language, it is doubtful that an official language existed. It is more likely that personal codes were used and that a woman who skillfully wielded her fan could express non-verbally a full range of emotions. The fan really became an extension of body language and a useful social tool. It functioned as a shield for the shy or unattractive, it veiled facial expressions, and it gave women something to do with their hands in formal or awkward social situations. The decorative aspect of the fan not only gave it value, but probably turned it into a "conversation piece." The cheaply produced engraved or



13.
Pleated fan, c. 1760–80
Europe
Painted, glazed paper, sticks of carved, incised, pierced, and painted ivory
24 × 45.5 cm.
Gift of Cole Porter
1955–46–4

etched fans that were popular among the middle classes illustrated particularly useful subjects for conversation: current events, game rules, dance steps, fortune-telling games, calendars, maps, Biblical subjects, Psalms, and scenes from operas, literature, and classical mythology.

In addition to revealing social and political interests, eighteenth-century pleated fans also reflected contemporary developments in painting. The fan leaf was treated as a surface on which to compose a miniature painting. While rigid handscreens could be made in any shape, the semicircular leaf of the more popular folding fan presented pictorial design restrictions. Oriental-inspired asymmetrical compositions with flat perspective were well suited to the shape of the fan, but traditional Western perspective, with foreground, middle-ground, and background, did not lend itself to the arched surface of the fan leaf. Earlier, in the seventeenth century, designs on European pleated fans had been composed as if they were being seen through a fan-shaped viewer, with traditional scenes arbitrarily cut off (figure 4). Another seventeenth-century compositional technique had been to divide the field into three sections, using one central scene and two side compositions, often framed in decorative borders (figure 5). During the eighteenth



14.
Pleated cabriolet fan,
c. 1760–80
France
Painted parchment backed with painted paper, sticks of carved, pierced, and painted ivory
29 × 46 cm.
Gift of Sarah Cooper Hewitt
1931–6–114

In a closed position, this cabriolet fan has a painting of a flower at the fore edge of the leaf.

century other ways of handling the arched field of the fan evolved. One way that appeared early in the century involved isolating the image in the center of the leaf and simply leaving the surrounding areas blank (figure 10). Another approach was to push the horizon line closer to the top of the fan shape, thereby lifting the middle-ground above the semicircle cut out of the bottom for the sticks. Less important parts of the composition were placed in the foreground at the left and right, below the center of action, raised as if on mounds (figures 9 and 11). Another device involved framing a scene with a decorative floral edging, often painted in gold, around the perimeter of the fan (figure 9). The secondary side images, the border designs, and the images on the back of the fan were usually painted by craftsmen less skilled than those who composed the central image on the front of the leaf.

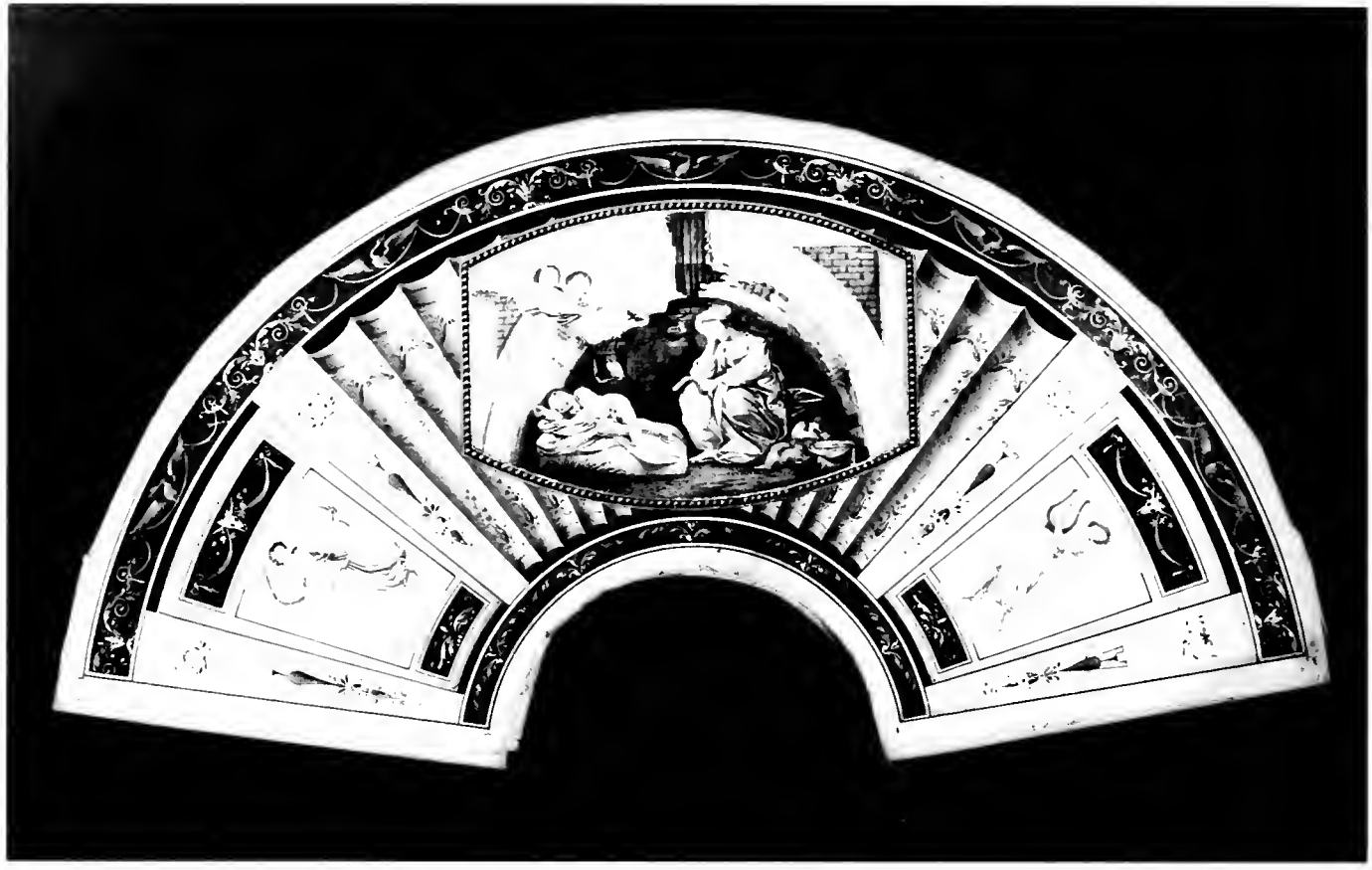
The decoration of the sticks of pleated fans also changed during the eighteenth century. During the first half of the century the generally contiguous placement of the sticks left no gaps between them and therefore allowed them to be treated as a surface for continuous decoration. By 1760,

15.
Pleated fan, c. 1780
France
Etched and hand-colored paper, sticks of bone
28 × 49.5 cm.
Gift of the trustees of the estate of James Hazen Hyde
1960-1-86

The images on the front of the fan, explained in French on the back, satirize the separation of America from England and refer to the 1778 treaty subsequently signed between America and France.

however, most fan sticks had become narrower, radiating out from the rivet like the spokes of a wheel and creating spaces between the sticks (figures 13 and 15). This sort of stick structure is referred to as a *monture sequelette*. Another mid-eighteenth-century style is the cabriolet fan. The word *cabriolet* initially referred to a two-wheeled, one-horse carriage invented in 1755 by an Englishman, Josiah Childs. The spokes of its wheels were more widely spaced than those of earlier carriage wheels and were reinforced with two or more concentric rings on the spokes. This carriage, a very popular design with Parisians, was depicted on articles of clothing and inspired the cabriolet fan, which has two or more concentric leaves (figure 14).

During the 1760s, the tripartite composition of the fan leaf first seen in the seventeenth century again became popular. The pictorial subject matter was clearly separated into central and side images, with each image framed as a separate painting within a decorative cartouche or medallion (figure 12). Typical themes of the period were Biblical and idealized pastoral, romantic, and domestic scenes (figure 12). The subject matter and painting styles were inspired by and



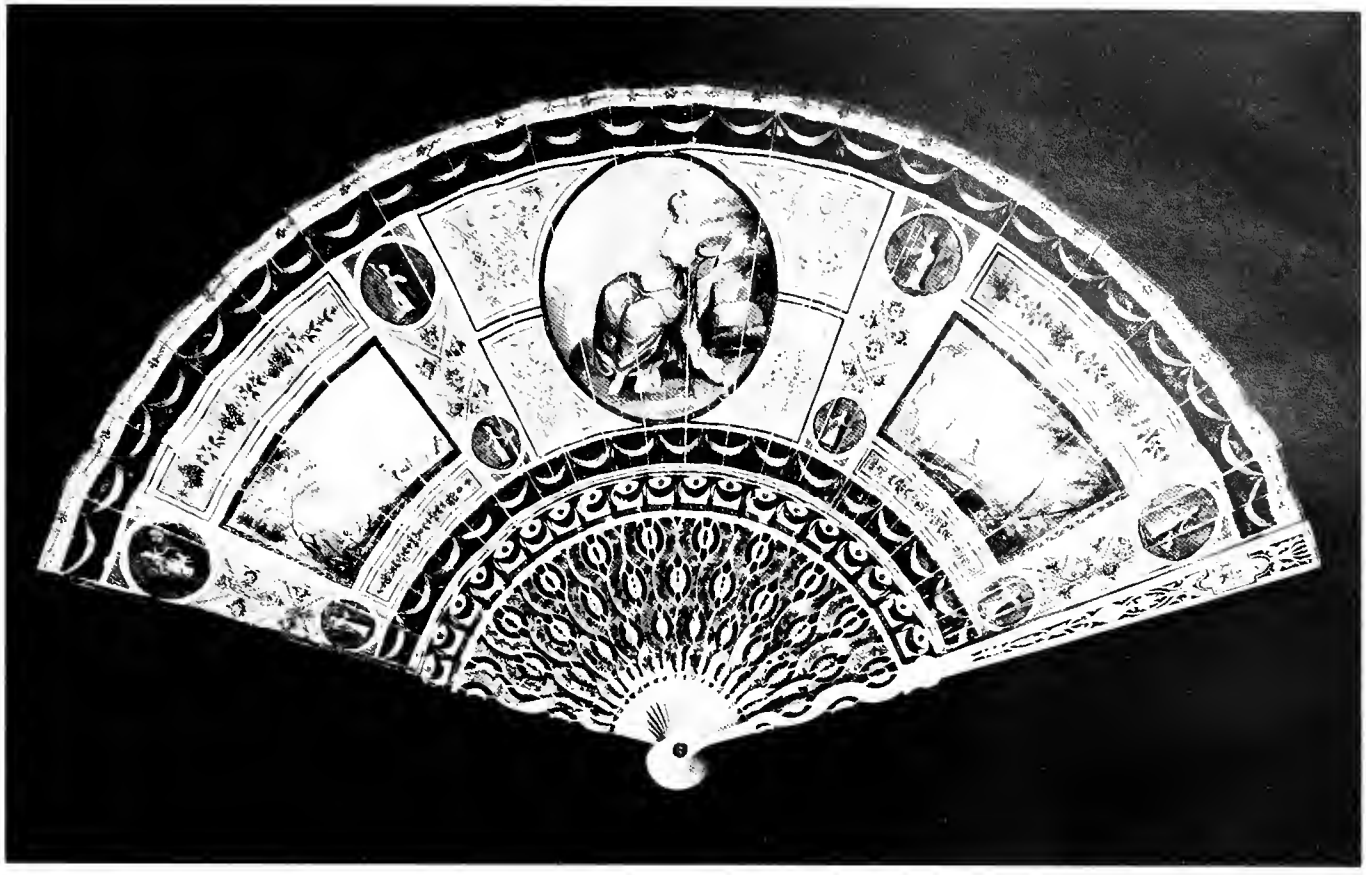
16.
Unmounted fan leaf,
c. 1790–1800
Probably Italy or France
Painted parchment
13 × 38 cm.
Anonymous gift
1952-161-239

The central cartouche of the leaf contains a scene from a painting by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (Guercino) (1591–1666) called, "Night with Sleep and Death near Her" from the Casino Ludovisi in Rome. The leaf is attributed to Elisabeth Vigée-LeBrun (1755–1842).

sometimes copied directly from popular contemporary paintings by such artists as Watteau, Boucher, and Fragonard. Watteau's aesthetic was particularly well suited to fans. His pastoral *fêtes galantes* were composed of scenes of quiet leisure-time activities, often occurring separately and simultaneously like the framed vignettes on fans. The sense of grace in combination with distance conveyed in these vignettes echoes one of the functions of the fan itself.

During the Louis XVI period (1774–89) there was a movement away from the earlier embellished baroque, rococo, and chinoiserie styles, toward simpler, more classical forms. The earlier division of fan surfaces into three distinct medallions marked the beginning of this change. The leaves were often made of stiffened silk, and the medallions were bordered with metallic spangles.

The era immediately preceding and during the French Revolution drastically changed French fashions and affected the fan industry throughout Europe. Due to economic upheaval, much of the structure of the fan-making trade was destroyed, and many of the special imported materials, such as ivory, were no longer available. Lacquerware, painted pastoral leaves, and other elaborate



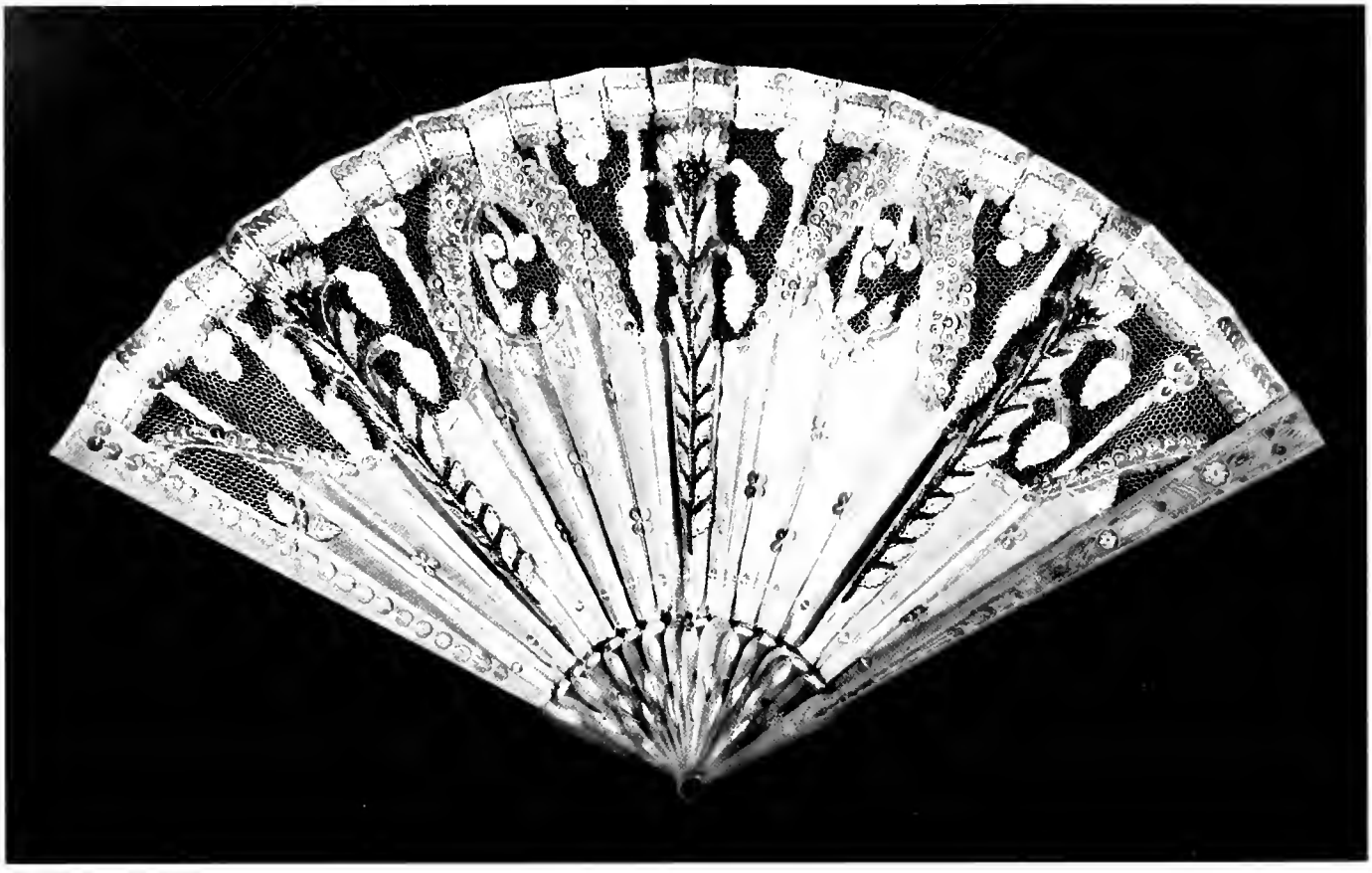
17.
Pleated fan, c. 1795–1805
Probably England
Painted parchment, sticks of carved, pierced, and painted ivory
25.5 × 46 cm.
Gift of Eleanor Garnier Hewitt
1931-65-167

The central medallion of the leaf depicts a woman as the allegory of the art of painting. This is a copy of a wall painting by Angelica Kauffmann (1741–1807), installed in 1779 at the Royal Academy at Somerset House in London.

decorative details disappeared in favor of plain leaves and simple bone or wood sticks (figure 15). Many of these fans had inexpensive printed leaves, which frequently carried political messages.

After the French Revolution, the remaining decade of the eighteenth century was dominated by a continuing simplicity and the more reserved neoclassical aesthetic in fashion, fans, and other decorative arts. In Europe a style of wall decoration gained in popularity that consisted of framed medallions surrounded by classical motifs. This style is seen clearly in fan design as the final development of the three-part leaf (figure 16). Italian classical ruins, well known to upper-class Europeans who made the Grand Tour during the eighteenth century, were often depicted on these neoclassical fans. The paintings of Angelica Kauffmann (1741–1807), a Swiss artist who worked in the neoclassical style, had a direct effect on fan design (figure 17).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, fan styles and the fan industry were still feeling the effects of the French Revolution. Craftsmen and expensive materials were no longer available, the middle classes demanded cheaper fans, and the aristocracy had lost some of its economic clout. This resulted in much smaller and simpler fans. Contemporary social commentary connected the



18.
Pleated fan, c. 1810
France
Silk with silk net, metallic spangles, stamped metal, sticks of incised horn, metallic foil
19 × 35 cm.
Gift of Miss Elizabeth d'Hauteville Kean
1923–24–8

use of smaller fans to a new and bolder behavior among women. Madame de Genlis, in her 1818 *Dictionary of Etiquette* observed, "When women were timid and blushed, they were accustomed to carry large fans to hide their blushes, serving at once as screen and veil: now that they blush no longer, and are intimidated by nothing, they do not choose to hide their faces, and therefore carry but microscopic fans." By this time, painted leaves had become quite rare (see Cover). Designers bypassed the difficulty of composing images on the fan shape by treating the leaf as a purely decorative surface. Small silk or gauze versions were decorated with stamped metal pieces or spangles, much like those that bedecked the simple muslin dresses of the time (figure 18). Brisé fans made of less expensive materials such as horn and bone became popular. With these, less skilled craftsmen were required to perform the minimal painting and drilling that replaced hand-carving of the sticks (figures 20 and 21).

The fan during this period was no longer a common, everyday accessory; contemporary depictions of women in casual settings rarely include the fan. It became instead an accessory

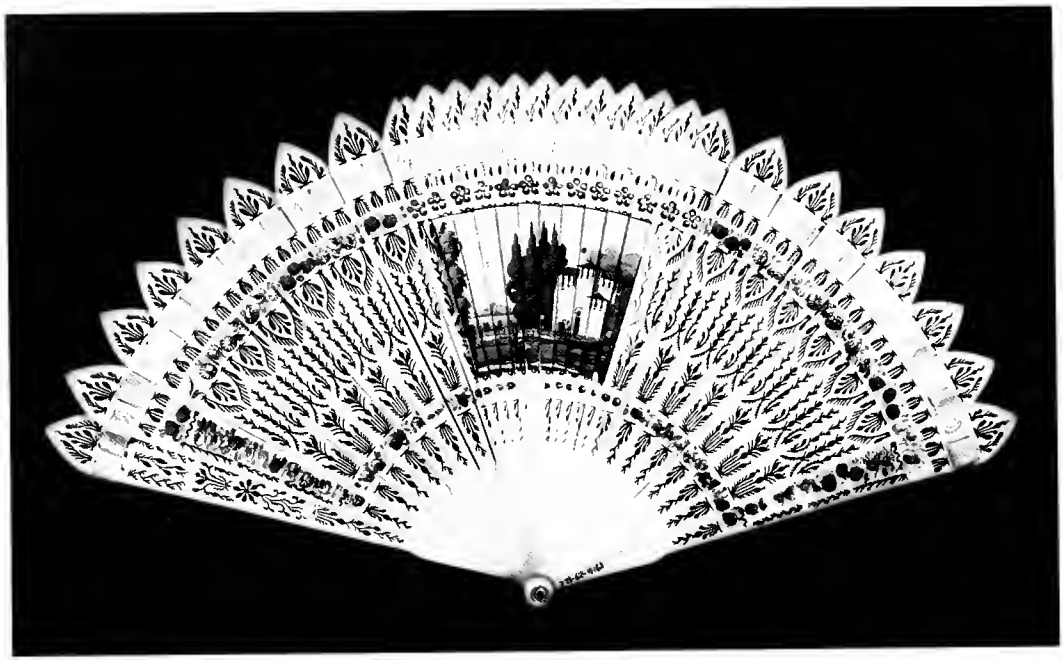
19.
Unmounted fan leaf, c. 1810
France
Hand-colored etching on paper, metallic spangles
18 × 34 cm.
Gift of Sarah Cooper Hewitt and Eleanor Garnier Hewitt
1924–15–5

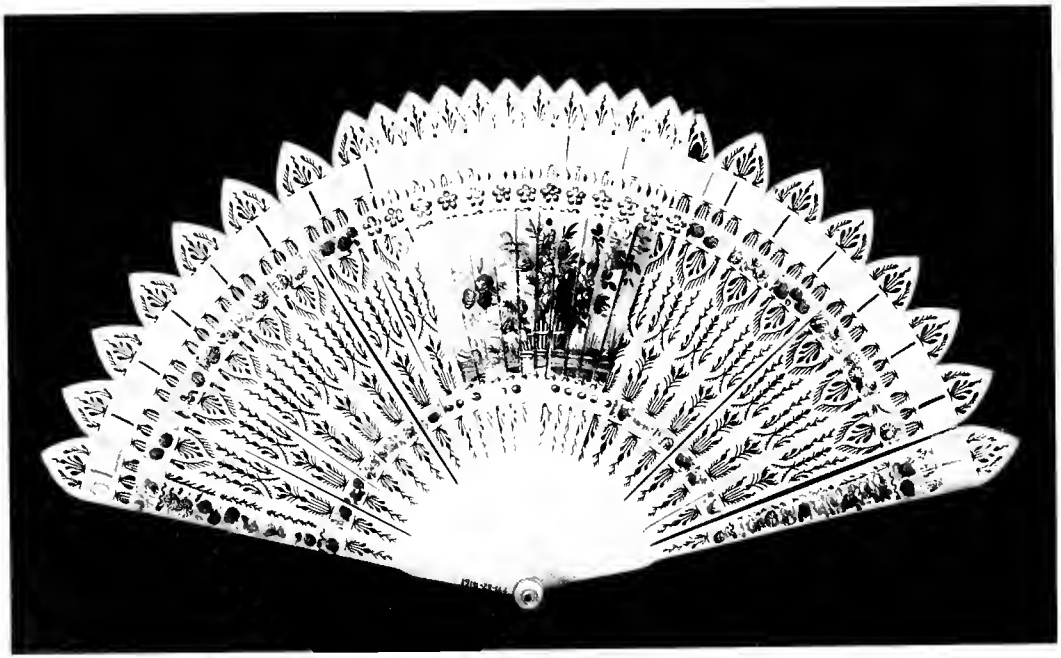
The leaf of this mourning fan is somberly painted in grisaille.

whose use was limited to formal or special occasions such as court appearances, balls, or weddings. Women also carried fans when they were in mourning. Printed mourning fans of somber scenes in tones of black and gray for full mourning and violet and blue for half mourning were in use during the first half of the century (figure 19). Some fans could be used for both stages of mourning, one side being appropriate for half mourning, the other for full.

With the restoration of the French monarchy (1814–30), however, came a nostalgia for the aristocratic styles of the previous century. Costume balls such as those given by Charles X and the Duchesse de Berry in the late 1820s, to which eighteenth-century costumes were worn, revived interest in fans and sparked the production of fans in eighteenth-century styles. The small fan gave way to a larger format.

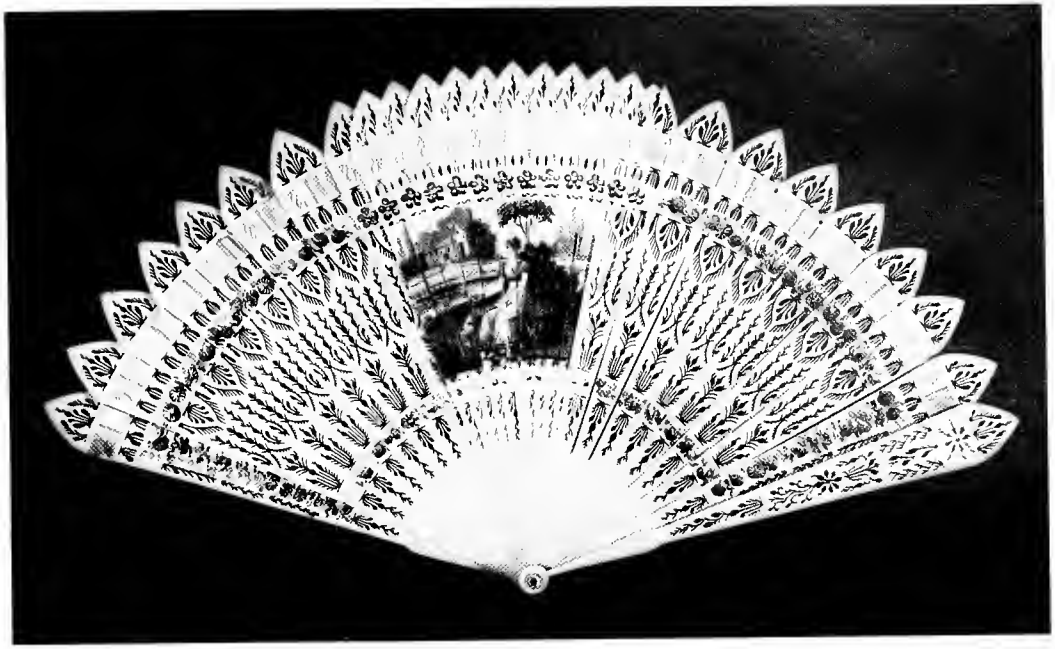
The next fifty years of fan styles, and of the decorative arts in general, are characterized by the return to styles from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (figure 22) and earlier periods, such as the Gothic. This resulted in stylistically confused and eclectic designs. Although fans were

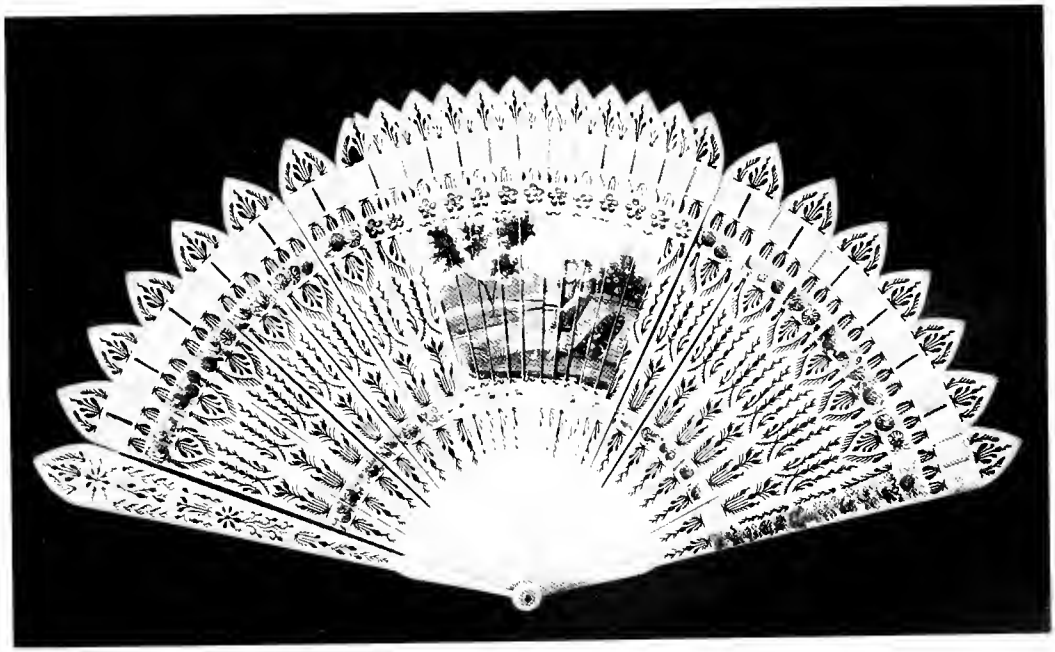




20.
Brisé fan, c. 1810–20
France, Italy, or Holland
Sticks of drilled and painted bone; silk ribbon
16 × 29 cm.
Gift of the Misses Schuyler
1916–29–122A

This fan is a four-way or puzzle fan. By opening the fan from the left or the right, the ten central sticks can overlap two different ways, creating two different pictures on each side for a total of four images.





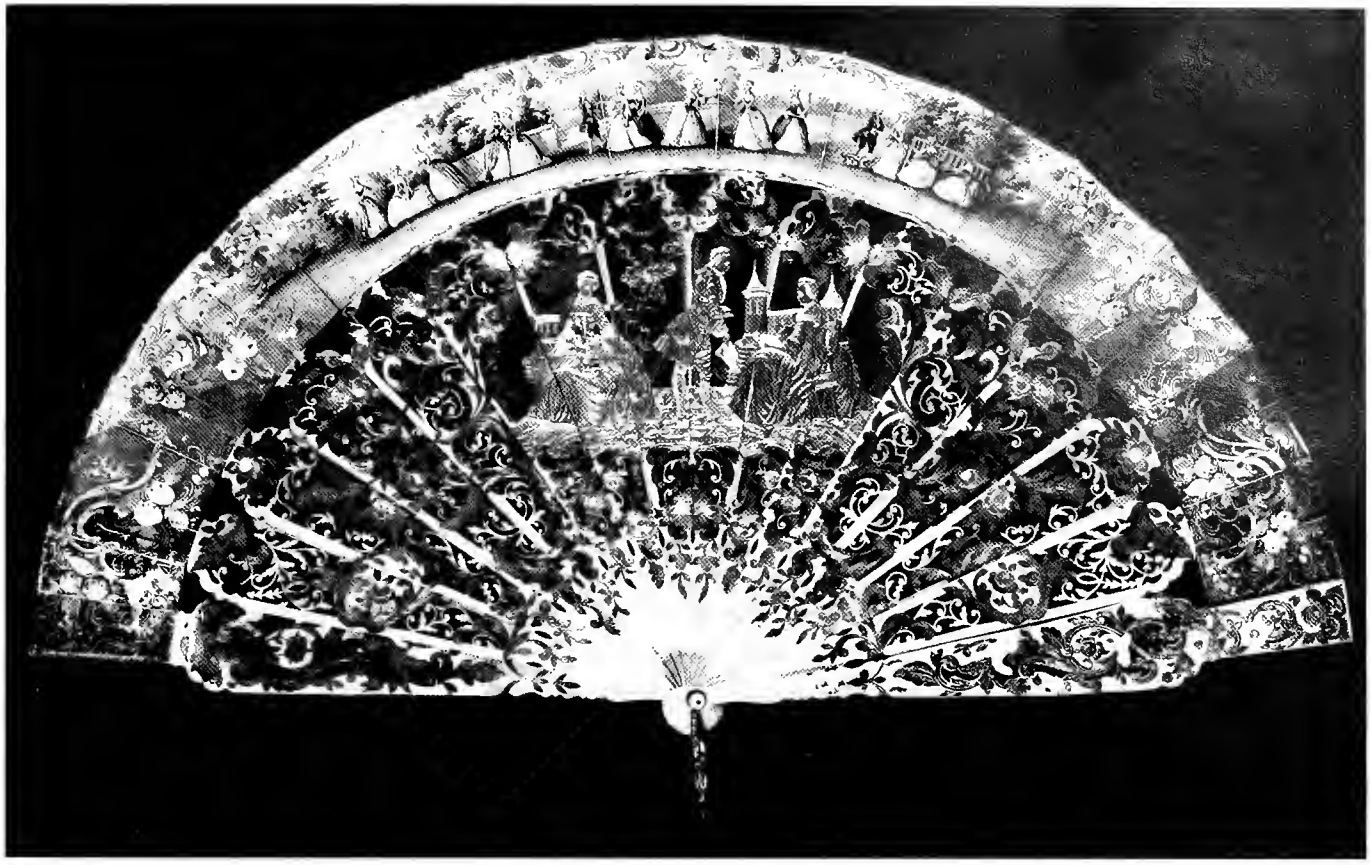
21.
Brisé fan, c. 1820–30
France
Sticks of painted horn, steel spangles; silk ribbon
20 × 36 cm.
Gift of Sarah Cooper Hewitt
1931–66–27

The motifs decorating the tips of the sticks reflect the Gothic revival of the period.

popular with the aristocracy and royalty (for example, Queen Victoria), the fan market increasingly focused on the middle classes.

Various industrial inventions facilitated the mass-production of inexpensive fans. In 1859, Alphonse Baude invented a machine for cutting and carving fan sticks. A machine that stamped designs on sticks was also invented. Lithography, a printing process that is quicker and simpler than etching or engraving and therefore cheaper, became, by the middle of the century, a common way of producing inexpensive fans. Many of these lithographed leaves were printed in revival styles. The leaves were often composed in three sections (as in the eighteenth century) or by curving the horizon line to follow the shape of the fan so that the figures radiated out at the same angles as the sticks below (figure 22).

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the proliferation of new industrial inventions influenced both fan design and production. Numerous patents were granted for innovative designs, both in Europe and in the United States. In the United States, around one hundred



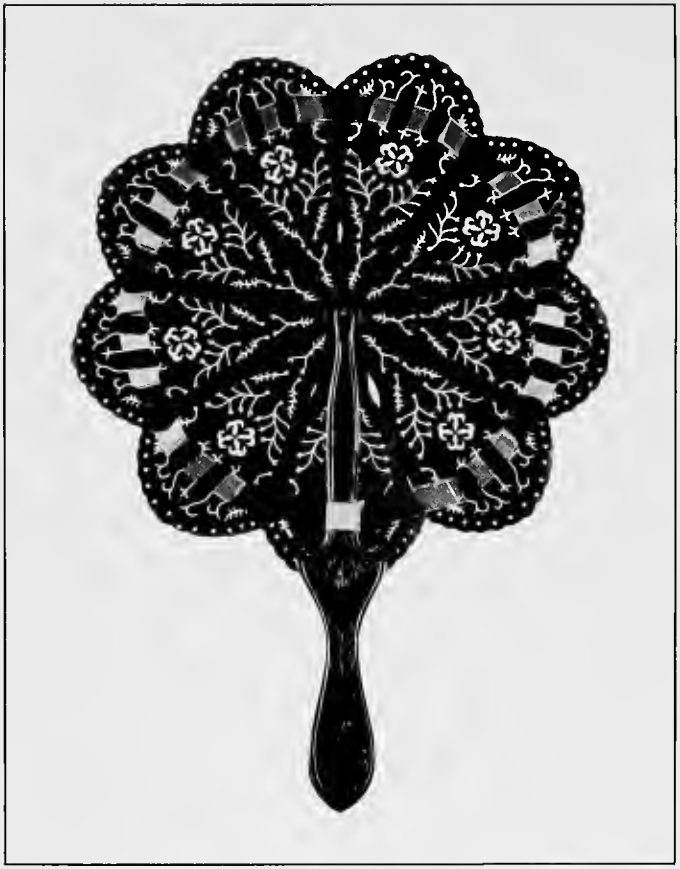
22.
Pleated fan, c. 1840
France, probably for the South American market
Hand-colored lithograph on paper backed with parchment, sticks of carved and incised mother-of-pearl, metallic foil, gold paint
28 × 51 cm.
Gift of Sarah Cooper Hewitt
1931-6-121

Elaborate sticks and narrow leaves such as those seen here were popular in nineteenth-century South America. The figures are dressed in eighteenth-century costume.

different patents for folding fans were recorded between 1866 and 1890. These designs included such things as pistol fans, parasol fans, opera glass fans, tube fans (figure 24), and fans made of new materials such as vulcanized rubber (figure 23) and celluloid.

The popularity of fans, their international sales, and the advent of novel designs and materials were further stimulated by a series of international exhibitions, starting with the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London and continuing throughout the nineteenth century in Europe and the United States (figure 25). The proliferation of ladies' magazines and newspapers containing fashion plates and advertisements for fans also helped spread fan styles during the second half of the century. With the birth of the large department store, fans became even more widely available. Establishments such as Tiffany and Company in New York imported fans from abroad and sold them in their stores.

Beginning in the 1860s, the reopening of trade with Japan, a nation that had been in virtual cultural isolation since the 1630s, had a revitalizing effect on the popularity of fans. Fans were

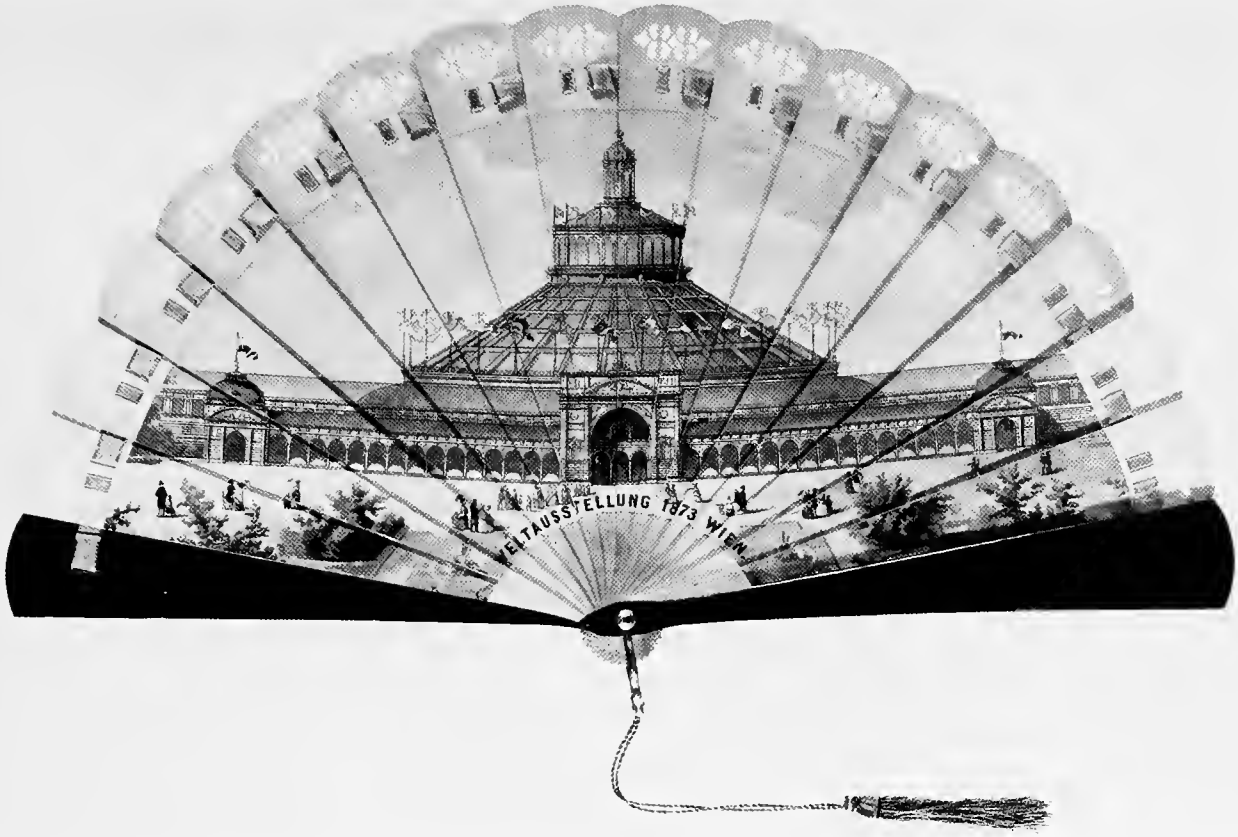


23.
Folding cockade fan, 1858
United States
Rubber, silk ribbon
34.5 × 24.5 cm.
Gift of Mrs. Henry Woodward Haynes
1951-106-3

24.
Folding fan, c. 1870-90
Probably United States
Glazed cotton, imitation tortoiseshell tube of plastic
26.5 × 16 cm.
Gift of Miss Mary Goodrich Fitch Beer
1952-2-1

imported from Japan at a level that surpassed Chinese imports: in 1888, England and France both imported over two million fans. Many of the Impressionist painters had just discovered Japanese prints and fans, and Degas, Morisot, Pissarro, and Gauguin even made paintings in the fan shape. Commercial fan-painting began to be considered an art form and fan painters signed their work, which, prior to the late nineteenth century, had happened very rarely. Plain silk or paper fan leaves and blank brisé fans were sold for amateur artists to embellish. Fans became more often the product of one hand; fan sticks and leaves were well matched and complementary, as opposed to many of the arbitrary combinations seen in eighteenth-century fans.

One of the most important changes in European fan design resulted from the introduction of Japanese leaf composition. European and American hand-painted fans of the period, usually large and often signed, clearly exhibit the Japanese influence: an elevated viewpoint, eliminating most of the sky; a flattening of perspective; and relatively arbitrary and asymmetrical compositions, utilizing flat, blank spaces (figure 26).



25.
Brisé fan, 1873
Austria
Sticks of wood with chromolithograph on paper, silk ribbon
22 × 38.5 cm.
Gift of Mrs. James O. Green
1920–10–2

This fan is a souvenir from an international exposition held in Vienna in 1873.

The last years of the nineteenth century were dominated by the continuing popularity of lace fans, feather fans, and a revival of the smaller gauze and spangled fans. Their diaphanous quality indicates that the fans of this period had less of a practical function, either in creating a breeze or as a social screen.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Paris was still considered to be the capital of fan fashion. In 1902, eighty-two fan-makers were active in Paris, many with their own commercial houses. The most famous of the Parisian fan houses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was Duvelleroy, whose fans were sought after and were widely copied (figure 27). The fan houses introduced new collections every year, in the popular styles of the time, such as art nouveau and, later, art deco. Lace fans, feather fans, and sequined fans continued to be seen and were adapted to current design tastes.

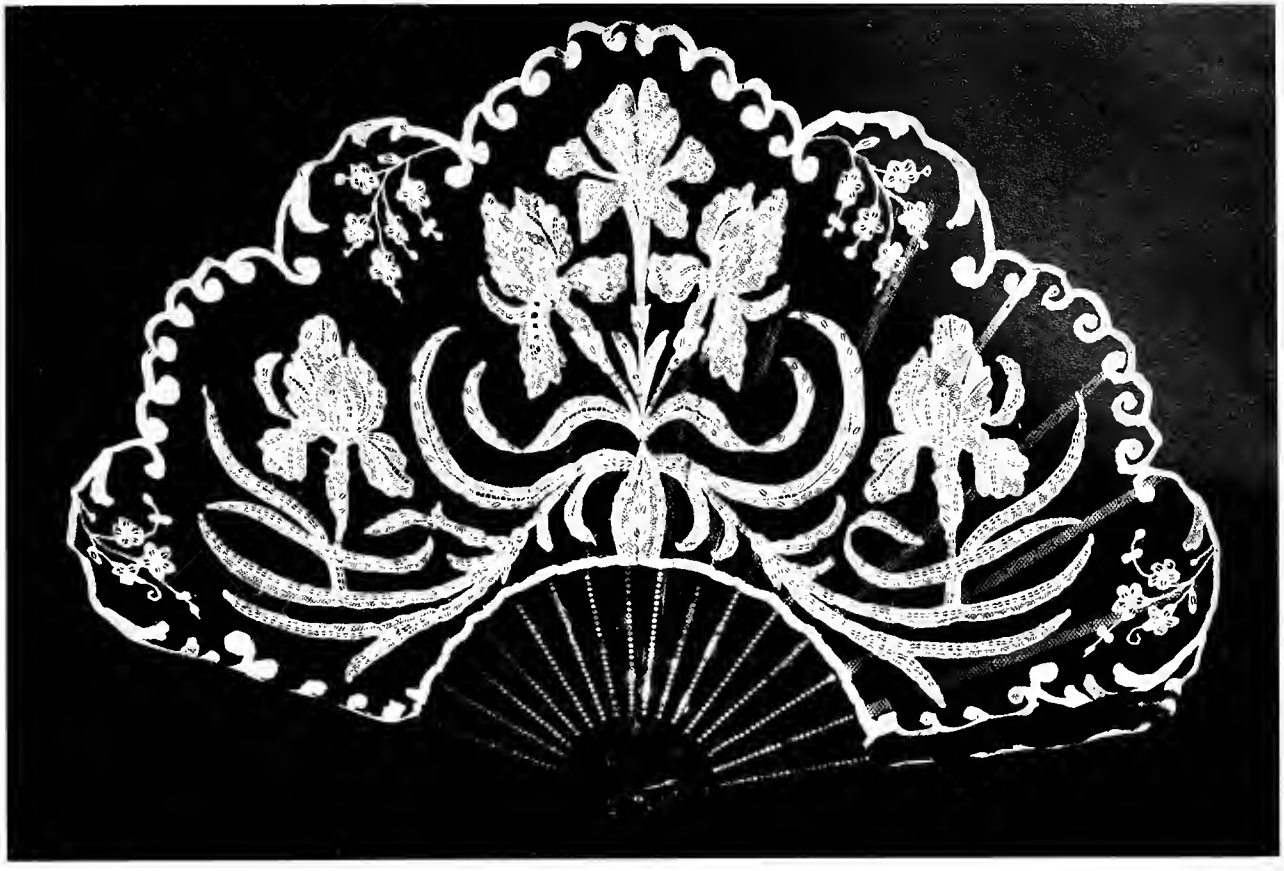
Shortly before World War I, the printed fan became popular as an advertising medium. The twentieth-century printed advertising fan perhaps has its origins in the printed fans of the

26.
Pleated fan, c. 1870–80
France
Signed, Albert-d'aprés F. Gérard
Painted and plain silk, sticks of tortoiseshell
30.5 × 56 cm.
Bequest of Sarah Cooper Hewitt
1931–66–28

eighteenth century that illustrated current events and topics of contemporary interest. Both the eighteenth- and the twentieth-century versions can be seen as excellent mirrors of their times. Twentieth-century advertising fans were made for resorts, restaurants, and hotels, and for manufacturers of cigarettes, beverages, and perfumes, in the graphic styles of the period.

After World War I, changes occurred in Western society that affected the functional role of the fan, both as a practical and as a social tool. By this time, houses could be cooled mechanically, women's clothing was more comfortable, and fireplaces were no longer a necessary part of every interior. The cooling and protecting functions of the fan were outmoded. On a social level, women became more emancipated and could express themselves in a straight-forward manner without demurring behind a fan. The inviting yet forbidding role of the fan in social settings was no longer appropriate. Women's hands were occupied with purses, cigarettes, and cocktail glasses.

Without a real function, the popularity of the folding fan as a personal fashion accessory waned in most of Europe and the United States. During the last years that fans were still in fashion in the



27.
Pleated fan, c. 1901
France
Cotton needle lace on silk net, sticks of tortoiseshell, steel spangles
30.5 × 42 cm.
Gift of Mrs. Max Farrand
1953-143-18

This unsigned fan is probably an imitation of a very popular design by Duvelleroy that was first introduced in 1901.

West, ending around 1930, the separation of function from fashion was almost complete. Most of the fans of this period were made of one or more large feathers and served merely as props for evening dress, the theater, or royal ceremonies. Just as the symbolic meanings attached to ancient fans were an outgrowth of their role as simple tools, the fashionable embellishment of folding fans seems to have been based on their practical role in society.

Today, folding fans are only in use in those settings where they still have a functional or social purpose, such as in hot climates where air conditioning is not in general use, for advertising, as souvenirs, in ceremonial court settings, or in countries such as China, Japan, and Spain, where the use of the fan as a social screen remains a tradition.

Lucy A. Commoner

Selected Reading List

Advertising poster, c. 1898
United States
Chromolithograph on paper
49.5 × 38 cm.
Gift of Harvey Smith
1967–59–28

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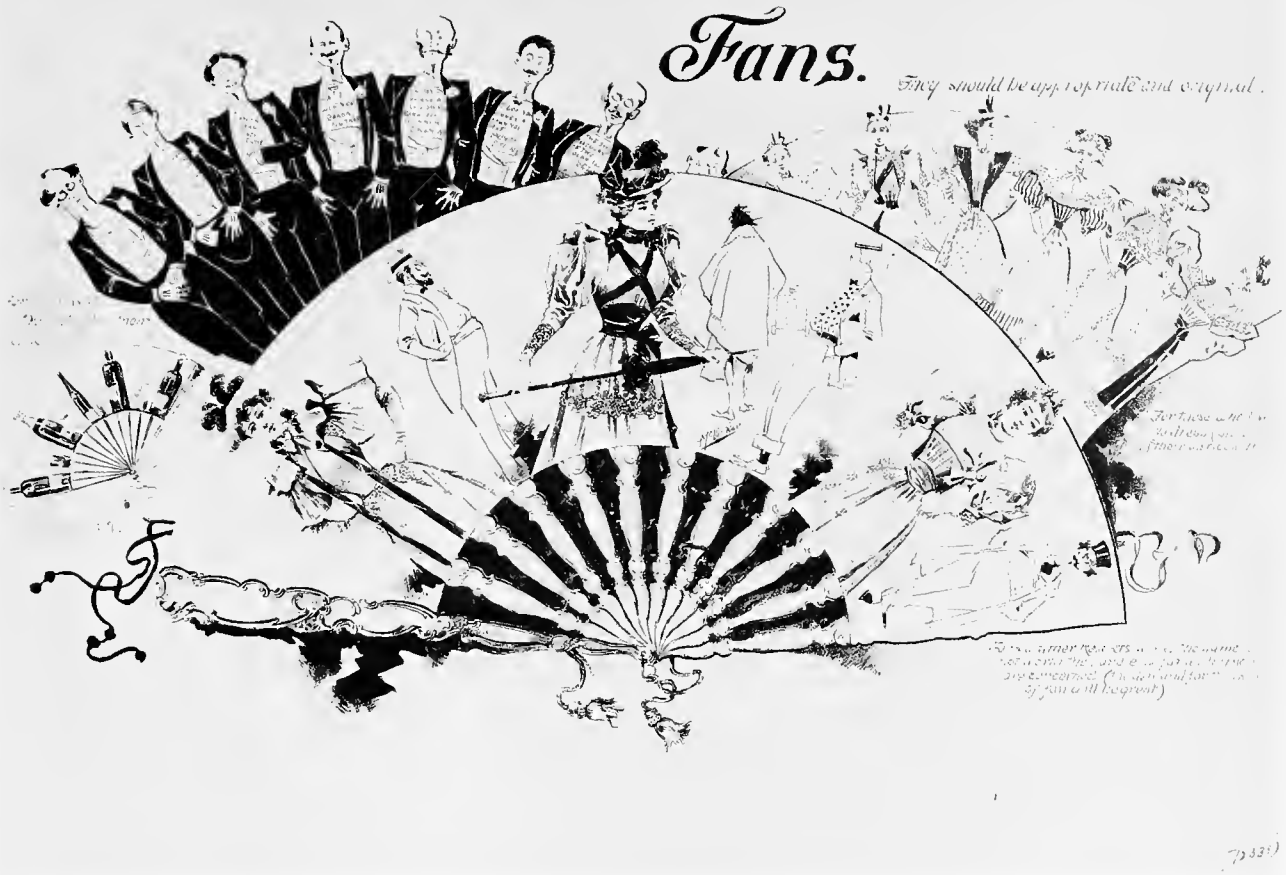

Cartoon, c. 1895
Henry W. McVickar
United States
Pen and brush, black ink on paper
39.5 × 52.5 cm.
Bequest of Erskine Hewitt
1938–57–1323

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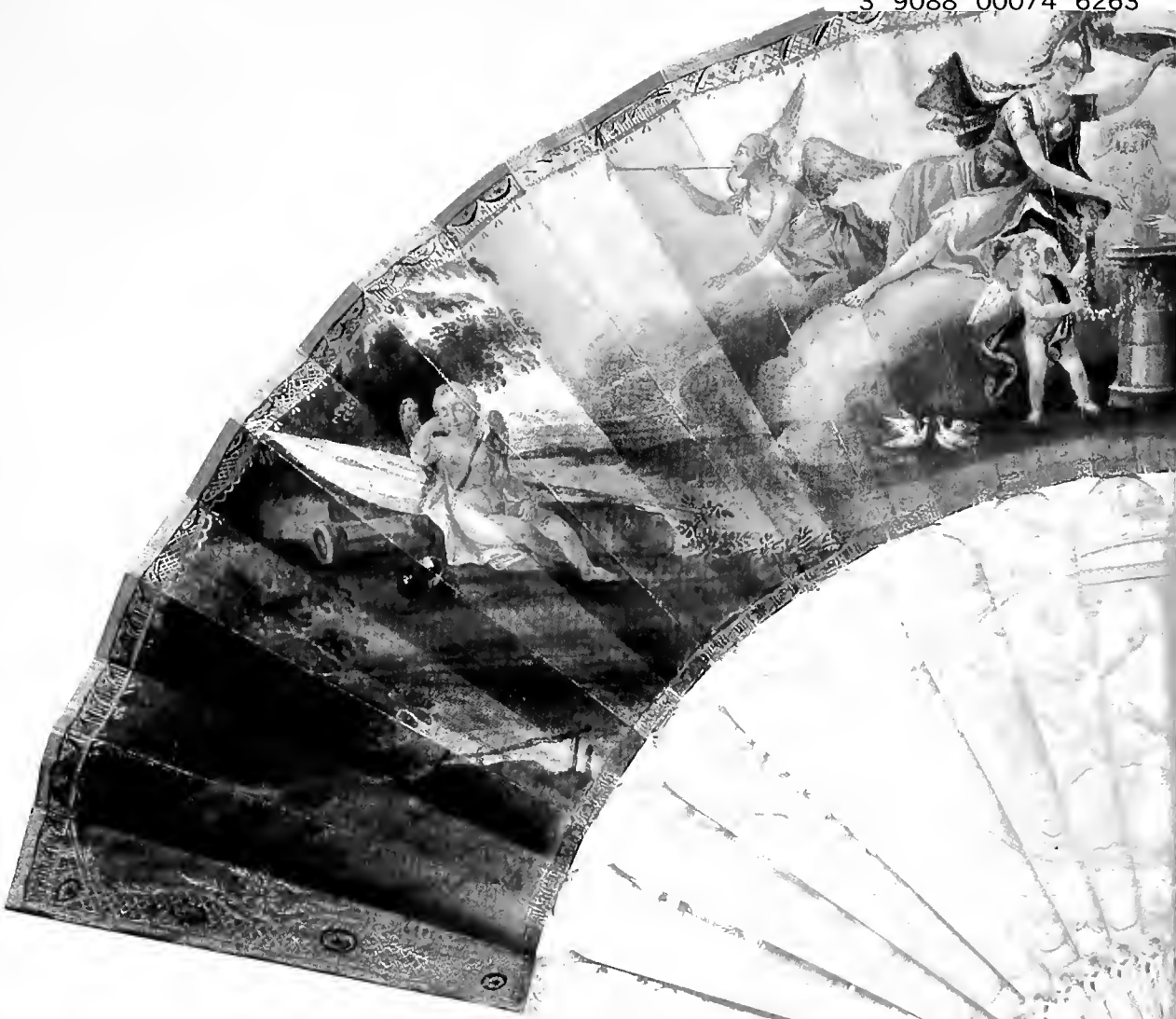

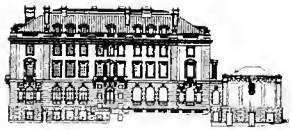

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